

The Experiences of Young African American Female Students Participating in a Rural
Upward Bound Program: A Qualitative Approach

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Ruth Jean

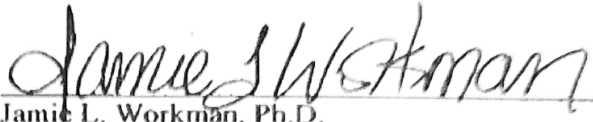
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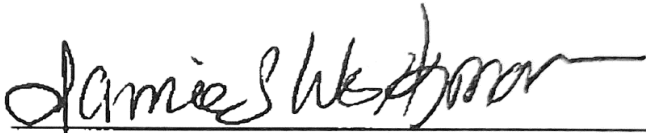
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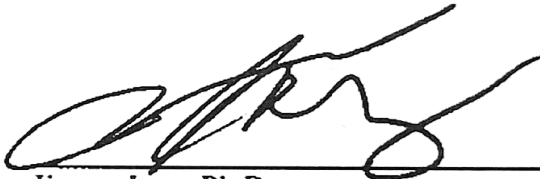
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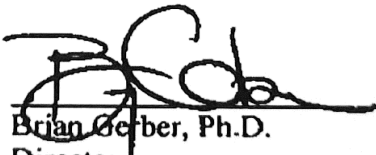


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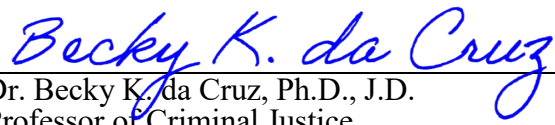


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ABSTRACT

African American students from rural environments face barriers preventing them from reaching academic success. Research have shown active participation in an Upward Bound program affect academic achievement and success for first-generation and low socioeconomic status students. This qualitative study used a basic interpretive approach to examine the experiences of female African American students who participate in an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. A total of seven students were involved in the study (five sophomores and two seniors). The resilience theory was used as the framework for the study and helped provide a better understanding on how the students' resilience and perseverance helped them overcome challenges. The study found seven participants benefited from the tutoring, mentoring, college visitations, workshops, financial support, and positive relationships they developed with the Upward Bound staff. The implications for Upward Bound staff was students seek exposure to experiences outside their rural towns and outside of their normal activities. Also, participants and those interested in joining the Upward Bound programs seek a family-like environments.

Key words: African American, at-risk students, ethnic minority, first-generation college students, resilience, socioeconomic status, TRIO programs

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my entire family, especially my father, Antoine G. Jean. My father was a God-fearing man who taught five of his children the value of education. While he was not a financially rich man, he was rich in blessings. I love him and understand why he was so hard on us growing up. On October 25, 2022, God called him home. While he may not be physically here to celebrate with me, I know he is in heaven cheering me on. May he rest in heaven and enjoy the Crown of Jewels the Lord has for him.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Few decisions matter more to a young person's future than the decision to attend college and earn a degree. Access to higher education has increased substantially, although some racial and ethnic groups remain underrepresented (Brock, 2010).

President Lyndon B. Johnson and his administration learned students would go to college if they had the money and not be burdened by debt once they graduated (Johnson, 2014). With that knowledge, as part of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1964 President Johnson created newly access programs, such as TRIO, with a primary objective of preparing socially and economically disadvantaged high school seniors for the rigor of college (Johnson, 2014). Upward Bound is a precollege program that serves students from first-generation and low-socioeconomic backgrounds; many of these students are the first in their families to attend a college or university. The Upward Bound program was the first TRIO program developed through the HEA, followed by the Talent Search in 1965 and Student Support Services in 1968. These three original programs are government-sponsored programs created to ensure widespread postsecondary education access (Johnson, 2014).

Upward Bound

The Upward Bound program receives the largest federal funding of the eight TRIO programs. During fiscal year 2020, funding allocation for Upward Bound was \$352,094,127 and there were 966 national program which served approximately 70,711

participants. The average award per program was \$364,487 for an average of 73 participants per program. The average cost per participant was \$4,979 a year (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021b), to be eligible for the Upward Bound program, students must have completed the 8th grade, between the ages of 13 and 19, and need academic support to pursue a program of postsecondary education. All students must be either from low-income families or be potential first-generation college students. Upward Bound requires two-thirds of the participants in a project must be both low-income and potential first-generation students. The remaining one-third must be low-income, first-generation college students, or students who have a high risk of academic failure. Upward Bound programs are located throughout the 50 United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Federated States of Micronesia as reported by the (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b).

Demographics of African American Females

As in literature, the mainstream public and the Black community often overlook Black female experiences from childhood through adulthood. Compared to research on Black boys, the amount of literature on Black girls is sparse (Muhammad & Dixon, 2008). Overwhelmed by “the Black problem” in education, research on the underperformance of Black students generally, and young Black males specifically, abounds in education and allied fields (Muhammad & Dixon, 2008). Historically, Black women were denied broad access to postsecondary education having to choose between a small number of Black women’s colleges and coeducational Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (Williams et al., 2020). Black women account for 16% of the total U.S. postsecondary college enrollment, and in 2013–2014, Black women held 12%

of all bachelor's degrees conferred (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Despite this statistical increase, and the realities of Black women holding the most degrees in the Black community, Black college women continue to endure misogynoir-based oppression including instances of sexual harassment, stereotypical ideals of Black womanhood, invisibility, and microaggressions (Williams et al., 2020).

During the 1970s, women lagged behind men in the number of college or university degrees completed in most nations (Marcus, 2019). Since then, there has been a dramatic and extraordinary reversal in the gender gap in higher education. For the first time in history, most women enroll in and complete higher education programs than men in most countries in the world (McDaniel, 2018; Sax & Harper, 2007). Fifty years ago, 58% of U.S. college students were men. Today, 56% are women. In 2019, for the first time, the share of college-educated women in the U.S. workforce passed the share of college-educated men (Marcus, 2019). According to Fry (2019), 29.5 million women in the labor force had at least a bachelor's degree, effectively matching the number of college-educated men in the workforce (29.3 million) in 2019. The number of female students was 7% higher in 2017 than in 2007 while the number of male students was 10% higher. Although male enrollment increased by a more significant percentage than female enrollment between 2007 and 2017, 57% of students in 2017 were female. In 2017, the enrollment rate for White 18- to 24-year-olds was 41%, and the enrollment rate for Black 18- to 24-year-olds was 36%. The number of bachelor's degrees awarded to females increased by 28% from 875,000 to 1,120,000, increasing 245,000 bachelor's degrees (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

With the continued increase in female college enrollment and completion, it is imperative to serve them in their higher education pursuits better.

The College Board (n.d.) found a college education provides a life of options rather than limitations. It is important to make college-going a standard rather than an option. Having support from school officials, parents, and the community makes higher education the expectation rather than the exception. A college-going culture helps students set and achieve high personal, academic, and career goals. While many Upward Bound students go off to college, many experience self-doubt and concerns about going to college. Many students question if they are good enough, smart enough, ready, or have the financial resources to attend college. Alizia True, a participant in the Pryor study, stated: “I began to experience doubts if this was the right path for me. I wanted to attend college because it seemed like the right thing to do, but I had to ask myself did I really want to go through four years of this?” (Pryor, 2018, p. 30).

Former first lady Michelle Obama recalled a call and response which she started as a youth in high school, “confidence I learned then, sometimes needs to be called from within I repeated the same words to myself many times now through many climbs, am I good enough yes I am” (Obama, 2018, p. 284). Young African American females must reach inside themselves to find the strengths to be resilient and motivate themselves to succeed. Muhammad and Dixson (2008) found statistically significant differences in Black female students' educational tracks compared to the rest of the population. Black females are 1.3% and 3.2% less likely to report enrolling in college preparatory and general tracks (Muhammad & Dixson 2008). Vega et al. (2015) recognized students of

color lag behind their White counterparts in standardized testing, high school completion rates, academic achievement, and college attendance and completion.

In 2015, 29% of 18- to 24-year-olds from rural areas were enrolled in a postsecondary education program compared to 48% from urban areas (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2019), 67% of students from suburban schools was more likely to enroll immediately than 62% from urban or rural 62% schools. According to Dennon (2021), although many graduate from high school, rural students are the least likely to attend college. Means et al. (2016) identified barriers which included lower family income and parental education, fewer school resources, less academically rigorous courses, lower academic achievement and postsecondary aspirations, and lower college attendance and completion rates as obstacles that are different from non-rural students.

Resilience Theory

The resilience theory is “the process of, capacity for, and outcomes of successful adaptation in spite of adversities which threaten development (Masten et al., 1990).

Norman Garmezy was instrumental in the development of Resilience Theory. Garmezy was a pioneer in research on risk and resilience (Masten et al., 2011). Glenn E.

Richardson (2002) developed metatheory of resiliency and resilience, which takes place in three phases:

The first wave of resilience research was an investigation into the qualities and characteristics of individuals who did well regardless of negative circumstances.

The second wave of resilience research involved understanding the processes of

resilient qualities, and the third wave had to do with discovering internal and external motivators that could enhance an individual's resiliency. (p. 308)

Grimard and Maddaus (2004) and Ilett (2019) all agree first-generation and at-risk TRIO students face obstacles in pursuing an education. The resilience theory will help provide a better understanding on how the students' resilience and perseverance help them overcome those obstacles.

Resilience may provide students with the capacity to endure in school. Resilience is the "capacity of individuals to overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities effectively or the ability to thrive physically and psychologically despite adverse circumstances" (Wasonga et al., 2003, p. 63). Being resilient often improves students' quality of life; being resilient helps students overcome certain adversity in their personal and academic life.

Statement of the Problem

Students who actively participate in the Upward Bound program for two or more years have more successful educational outcomes (McElroy & Armento, 1998).

Federally funded college preparatory programs such as Upward Bound spend large amounts of federal funds on participants. The Department of Education requires documentation of positive outcomes to ensure continued funding. Ideally, the Upward Bound program offer a symmetry of services for participants. Without the program students would lack access to quality academic, financial, and cultural services.

However, there are many barriers that still hinder the success of the participants such as a paucity of academic aspirations, race and gender gaps, low socioeconomic status, dearth of academic resources available to rural youth, and being raised in first-generation

households. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) discovered once enrolled in an Upward Bound program, students began to benefit academically, financially, and socially.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) examined gender bias and achievement gaps in education for decades. The Upward Bound programs seek to assist with closing the achievement gap by providing academic and financial resources for students who fall in those categories. The Upward Bound program services include, but are not limited to tutoring, mentoring, financial assistance, academic and cultural programs, field trips, and college visitations (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b).

Grimard and Maddaus (2004) emphasized program services are vital in the participants' choice to make future academic decisions. None of the aforementioned studies specifically explored females in a rural Upward Bound program. This prompted the researcher to further investigate the barriers of young African American female students from a rural Upward Bound program resilience. Using a basic interpretative approach, this study examined the experiences of young African American female students from a rural Upward Bound program who learned how to matriculate through the educational pipeline despite barriers.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative research is to investigate the ways young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program. The scope of the study is limited to the experiences of African American females who participate in a rural Upward Bound program. The literature is saturated with research focusing on African American males in Upward Bound programs in urban areas; however, only African American females in a rural

Upward Bound program will participate in this study. The core factors and concepts analyzed in the research study are: characteristics, motivations, concerns, advantages, and experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) form the basis for this investigation:

- RQ 1. How do young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program?
- RQ 2. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?
- RQ 3. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants regarding the program's influence on their personal growth development?

Significance of the Study

According to Lee (2019), 31% of adults 25 years old and over, have a bachelor's degree or above in Georgia. Thirty-nine percent have an associate's degree or above. Postsecondary attainment varies by county. Attainment rates are highest in metro Atlanta counties, where about 50% of adults have bachelor's degrees, and lowest in rural areas. Large racial and ethnic differences exist in postsecondary educational attainment in Georgia. Overall, about 4 in 10 Georgians older than 25 have an associate's or bachelor's degree. The share is closer to two in 10 for Latinx Georgians and three in 10 for African Americans. Limited research exists on rural Upward Bound programs (Grimard & Maddus, 2004) and no research has been conducted with African American females who participate in the Upward Bound program in rural settings. Young female

students, particularly those from minority backgrounds, often underestimate their potential for academic achievement (Sax & Harper, 2007). This study filled a void in the literature by helping to understand the students' process, characteristics, motivations, participation, and concerns as they matriculate through the program. I also assessed the program's contributions to the students' academic outcomes. The researcher's findings inform program directors of ways to meet the academic and social needs of future young female African American participants and provide policy makers with data to support college preparatory programs.

Lee (2019) affirmed educational attainment affects more than income. Individuals with higher education levels experience better health outcomes and longer life expectancies, and parents' education levels also affect their children's health and education. Communities with higher levels of education experience less crime, lower rates of incarceration, and greater participation in school. Education beyond high school increases the likelihood of voting, volunteering, and charitable giving (2019). This study gained information that continue to improve females' educational opportunities for the future. The study informed program directors of ways to meet the academic needs of future young female African American participants and provided policy makers with data to support college preparatory programs.

Methods

The researcher sought to understand the experiences, outcomes, relationships, lives, journeys, successes, and or failures of young African American rural Upward Bound female participants, through a basic interpretive qualitative research design. "The overall purpose [of basic interpretive qualitative research] is to understand how people

make sense of their lives and experiences” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 38).

Therefore, a basic interpretive research design was appropriate for this study as the primary purpose was to uncover and interpret these experiences. Due to the scope of the study, the researcher implemented purposeful and criterion sampling techniques. Patton (2015) described criterion sampling as the best method in obtaining participants who must meet a specific set of criteria. Patton asserted, “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research; thus, the term purposeful sampling” (p. 53). The researcher used these two sampling techniques in this study to ensure the sample provided rich qualitative data about the experiences of individuals who share specific criteria.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The Upward Bound director granted me access to program participants and information. To recruit participants for the study, the program director of the rural Upward Bound program was asked to contact the parents of potential participants. The program director provided students with the Research Project Advertisement (Appendix G). I provided the director with participant criteria, information on being in a research study, and informed consent forms to give to potential participants and their parents or guardians. After the program director contacted parents and guardians, she was asked to compile a list of students interested in participating in the study. Once the list was received from the program director, I set up a time to meet with potential participants and their parents or guardians to discuss study details, answer questions and concerns regarding the study, and officially invite the students to participate in the study. Each participant and his or her parent or guardian was given a letter of invitation to participate

in the study. The letter explained all participant criteria as well as explained the significance of the study. Potential participants who were interested in participating in the study was asked to sign the informed assent forms. Parents or guardians of potential participants under age 18 were also asked to sign a parental consent form.

The participants were between the ages of 14 to 19. While Upward Bound programs accept students in the ninth grade, the study did not include ninth-grade students. The study focused on students in the 10th through 12th grades who have been in the program for a minimum of one academic and summer year. Each participant has received Upward Bound services, including tutoring, mentoring, career and personal counseling, exposure to cultural events, and other educational assistance necessary for advancing students through the educational pipeline (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). Selected participants also participated in the Upward Bound program's summer residential component, located on a 4-year college campus in Georgia prior to the interviews.

Data Collection

I obtained approval to conduct research from the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before conducting the interviews (Appendix F). The method of data collection was interviews of African American female students to make meaning of their experiences. Maxwell (2013) argued research questions functions specifically to explain what the researcher intends to learn or understand. The main data collection method used to gather data for this study was the qualitative interview. The researcher also served as a research instrument (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful and criterion sampling techniques ensured the sample provided rich qualitative data about the

experiences of individuals who share specific criteria. I drew the research sample from the current female African American student population from one rural Upward Bound program in the Southeastern United States. I used a modified version of Seidman's (2013) three-interview approach; to prevent participant dropout, I conducted one 45-60-minute semistructured interview with each participant.

The researcher created and distributed a demographic questionnaire to participants via Qualtrics prior to the first interview. The participants were allowed to review the study research questions and provide feedback before the individual interviews. I collected consent to record interviews prior to each interview. Participants participated in a 45-60-minute one-on-one interview. I conducted interviews using the Zoom platform due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and social distance guidelines. At the beginning of the interview, I shared background and interest in the topic to create a rapport with the participants while encouraging ease and openness throughout the research process. I developed an interview protocol that encouraged rich and purposeful responses. See Appendix A for interview questions and Appendix B for demographic questionnaire.

Definition of Terms

The definition of key terms follow for clarity and consistency:

African American (including those who self-identify as Black) is defined as a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (United States Census Bureau, 2021a).

At-Risk Students. The term at-risk is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or

dropping out of school. Depending on their degree of resiliency and connectedness to caring adults in the home, in the community, and/or at school, students may respond differently to those things frequently cited as barriers, predictors, or indicators of being “at risk.” Therefore, educators and other responsible adults working with students should consider the whole child, who might have both short-term and long-term needs requiring intervention.

Ethnic Minority is a group of people who are different in race, nationality, religion, or cultural origin from the dominant group of the population. The various identity of an ethnic minority may be presented in numerous ways, from unique customs, lifestyles, language or accent, dress, and food to particular attitudes, moral values, and economic or political beliefs championed by members of the group.

Low-income. The term “low-income individual” means an individual from a family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a).

First-Generation College Students are students who are first in their family to attend an institution of higher education.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Rural is defined as “any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area” (United States Census Bureau, 2021b, para. 2).

Socioeconomic Status is the position of persons in society, based on a pattern of occupational, economic, and educational criteria on an ordinal scale. Further factors, including ethnicity, literacy, and cultural characteristics, influence socioeconomic status, which is an important determining factor of health.

TRIO Programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs. TRIO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRIO projects (U.S. Department of Education, 2021c).

Organization of the Study

The researcher divided the proposed organization of this document into five chapters. Chapter I introduced the problem, rationale for the study, and the research questions. Chapter II consists of a literature review of the critical topics and conceptual framework of the study. The literature review included pertinent information of resilience theories on youth and African American females, African American female persistence factors, and an overview of the Upward Bound program. Chapter III provides the study's proposed methodology, including discussing the research site, data collection, and analysis procedures. Chapter IV examines the experiences and perceptions of the seven African American female interview participants. Chapter V presents the findings of the research project, including student demographic data and student excerpts and

Chapter VI concludes the study and discusses implications, limitations, contribution to the field, conclusion, and future research directions.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review offers contextual evidence that provided insight into the experiences of young African American female students participating in a rural Upward Bound program. Various sources provide understandings of the research topic. A historical overview of Federal TRIO Programs, the characteristics of TRIO programs, and the reasons for their existence are provided. By providing detailed historical facts on TRIO programs, specifically Upward Bound, the readers will better understand the context in which African American female students experience the program. Literature is provided that details the need for precollege programs and highlights the program's effectiveness. Previous research on Upward Bound students' perceptions and experiences was vital in providing additional understandings of the identified study.

Literature is presented to better understand African American females' experiences through the educational pipeline. Information is also presented on the challenges, successes, motivators, and experiences of rural students as it relates to education. This literature helped the researcher understand the needs, barriers, and recommendations for this population. Literature that identified and connected rural students in Upward Bound was beneficial to highlight the students' experiences in the program. It was necessary to have literature that identified the perceived barriers for the rural population in education as it correlated with the need for more Upward Bound programs in rural areas.

Literature on the resiliency and tenacity of students explored what drives students as they matriculate in school. Conceptual framework on the resilience theory and how it connects to the experiences of African American Upward Bound students in rural areas is also discussed. The review focused on academic gaps among African American female students. I addressed and reported the observed differences in the characteristics, experiences, and achievements of students which helped me better understand ways to improve them.

Conceptual Framework

Resilience Theory

Maxwell (2013) defined conceptual framework as “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research as a key part to the design” (p. 39). Many scholars have investigated and expanded on the resilience theory (Evans-Winters, 2014; Garmezy, 1991a; Garmezy & Rutter, 1988; Morales, 2008; Richardson et al., 1990). The theory of resilience emerged from psychology and child development (Richardson et al., 1990). According to VicHealth (2015), Dr. Garmezy was a clinical psychologist often credited as being the founder of research in resilience. Garmezy’s (1991b) research began with studying schizophrenia and other mental illnesses and later shifted to research on stress resilience. Researchers at the time were studying risks, problems, and deficits; they did not recognize how to understand positive developments, outcomes, and the differences between the two (Richardson et al., 1990). The concept of resilience was developed to understand how some individuals maintain healthy lifestyles regardless of adversities, stressors, and life-changing events. Richardson et al. described a perspective of resiliency: Flach’s “Law

of Disruption and Reintegration” is a central theme in the resiliency model (p. 34). This suggests that the temporary state of confusion and anguish is a singular opportunity to resolve old wounds, discover new ways to deal with life, and effectively reorganize perspectives. Resiliency is the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in ways that provide individuals with additional protective and coping skills prior to the disruption.

The resiliency model illustrates four points of intervention; each point of intervention requires vaguely different purposes and facilitation (Richardson et al., 1990). Richardson is also a notable researcher for his work with the Resiliency Theory. Richardson published the “Resiliency Model” in 1990 and later the “Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency” in 2002. Richardson sought to understand how people can thrive through adversity. Richardson (2002) presented the resiliency and resilience theory as three waves: Resilient Qualities, Resiliency Process, and Innate Resilience.

Integrative outcomes are desired after each of the Three Waves of Resilience Inquiry. The outcomes of the first wave (Resilient Qualities) are assets or protective factors that help people grow through adversity. The second wave (The Resiliency Process) assists individuals in choosing between resilient reintegration, reintegration back to the comfort zone, and reintegration with loss. Resilient reintegration is the desired outcome as it is the highest level of growth and adaptation in the resilience process. The outcome of the third wave (Innate Resilience) is helping individuals to discover and apply the force that drives a person towards self-actualization and to resilient reintegration from distractions (Richardson, 2002).

The Resiliency Model

Stressors, Adversity, Life Events. According to Richardson et al. (1990), the resiliency model depicts points in time in an individual's life; this point may be only a matter of minutes or represent years of disruption. This idea of the resilience model is that there must be disruptions, challenges, stressors, disorganizations in an individual's life. To become more resilient, the person must reorganize and learn from the experiences with stronger coping skills. The stressors young African American females may be faced with are racism, sexism, and/or classism in addition to the normal stressors that students contend with, such as peer pressures, social acceptance, gender identity, racial identity, and overall perception of self (Evans-Winters, 2014). See Appendix C for a visual representation of the Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency Model.

Biopsychospiritual Homeostasis. "Biopsychospiritual homeostasis is a point in time when one has adapted physically, mentally, and spiritually to a set of circumstances whether good or bad" (Richardson, 2002, p. 311). Richardson stated that biopsychospiritual homeostasis is usually inundated with internal and external life prompts, stressors, adversity, opportunities, and other forms of change. To cope with these life prompts, people must grow through previous disruptions, and learn resilient qualities for them to become routine and less likely to be disruptive. For most individuals, biopsychospiritual homeostasis is a desirable condition; when a person's emotions are out of balance (e.g., uncontrolled anger), they initiate mechanisms to return their emotion to a controlled state (Richardson et al., 1990). The homeostatic mechanism may be socially appropriate (intense studying) or inappropriate (fighting, violence, destruction); however, the individual reverts to the normal homeostatic state over time.

In this state, young African American females may find themselves consumed with anger and in need of a mechanism through which to challenge that anger. Some may turn to violence while others may put that energy into their academics. Many African American females are compounded with stressors, adversities, and challenges in numerous life steps. The stress of being born into poverty, dealing with gender, stereotyping, facing tougher school punishments, receiving lower pay, being judged negatively on appearances, and so many more. Morales (2008) found given the resistance and hostility females of color faced, it is logical they may internalize the belief their success would require more energy and effort.

Disruption. Disruption is a necessary factor in the resilience process. Richardson (2002) emphasized “Disruptions mean an individual’s world paradigm is changed and may result in perceived negative to positive outcomes. That a new puzzle piece is there to potentially add to an individual’s view of the world” (p. 311). When a new piece is added to the puzzle, the other pieces are affected and may fall apart. Being accepted into college and deciding to live on campus can be disruptive in an African American females’ life because it represents change. Reactive disruption may also include undesirable prompts such as having to leave a part-time job or a minor injury. Planned disruptions are individual calculated actions such as taking standardized test, applying for college, or getting a part-time job. Richardson (2002) asserted almost all, if not all disruptions have a potential for growth.

Destruction results in primary emotions that potentially lead to introspection. Hurt, loss, guilt, fear, perplexity, confusion, and bewilderment are some common primary emotions that surface in the immediate wake of

disruption. This is the “poor me” stage of the resiliency process and an opportunity for helpers to listen and sympathize. For authentic change, the emotion may revolve around self-doubt or questioning of the ability to learn new skills associated with change. (p. 312)

African American female students may feel a range of emotions when deciding to go to college such as guilt (leaving their family behind); fear (of failing); and confusion (how are they going to pay for school or if they are making the right decision about attending college). As time passes and they begin to adapt to their new life and situation they begin the reintegration process.

Reintegration. Resilient reintegration is to experience some insight or growth through disruptions (Richardson, 2002). The process of resilient reintegration is an introspective experience in identifying, accessing, and nurturing resilient qualities. Richardson found resilient reintegration results from the identification and strengthening of resilient qualities. The process of resilient reintegration can be viewed as additional protective measures when dealing with life stressors. Richardson found often people cling to their “comfort zones” and may turn down opportunities for growth to avoid disruption. For example, a student living in a rural area may turn down an acceptance to a college or university to avoid having to leave their comfort zone. The principle of reintegration back to homeostasis is to heal and “just get past” a disruption however, with permanent physical loss, moving, or death may not be possible to return to biopsychospiritual homeostasis which leads to dysfunctional reintegration.

Dysfunctional Reintegration. Dysfunctional reintegration occurs when people resort to substances, disruptive behaviors, or other means to deal with life prompts

(Richardson, 2002). Richardson recognized some people who dysfunctionally reintegrate have blind spots in their introspective skills and require treatment to fill those holes. The value of treatment and education is people recognize they have choices to grow, recover, or lose in the face of disruptions. “A succinct statement of resilience theory is there is a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength, and this force is resilience” (Richardson, 2002, p. 313). The resilience movement helps understand where and how to access motivation and drive to face and overcome adversities.

Reintegration With Loss. Recovering with loss mean that people give up some motivation, hope, or drive because of the demands from life prompts. (Richardson et al., 1990).

Reintegration Back to Homeostasis. During the resilience process most individuals look to return to a point in their lives before the disruption occurred. Reintegration Back to Homeostasis is the fight by the individual to return to the same level of function that was present prior to the life event. Individuals who return to the same level of homeostasis really have not learned from the experiences. They may likely have similar recurring problems until they learn from the life event (Richardson et al., 1990).

Resilient Reintegration. Resilient Reintegration signifies the ideal level of adaptation. The individual learns new skills and better understands personal influences while going through the reintegration process (Richardson et al., 1990). In resilient reintegration, an event can add or remove a component to the individuals’ lives. The major factor to resilient adaptation is to benefit from all life has to offer. Through the

resilient reintegration process, a resilient individual can put her/his life back together in a way that leaves her/him with more protective factors and skills to effectively reintegrate if faced with future life events (Richardson et al., 1990).

In the face of hardships and adversities, African American females may use them as an excuse to stay in that situation or can learn from the event and become resilient to future stresses. Several research articles have provided evidence that many African American females are resilient and have used negative life events and experiences to motivate them to succeed (Clayton, 2017; Morales, 2008; Nunn, 2016; Paul & Araneo, 2019). Based on the resilience theory, the researchers believed various factors (poverty, being female, African American, adversities, and violence, etc.) influence young African American females' unique experiences through the educational pipeline K-12 and beyond. Although this population may face several barriers and stressors in life, many learn to cope and overcome their adversities. TRIO and other precollege programs are influential in helping youth overcome adversities and matriculate through the educational pipeline.

TRIO Programs

To understand how, what, and why TRIO program experiences are important in the lives of young participants one must first understand how and why these programs were created. TRIO, which is a Title IV program, has been in existence for over 50 years serving above 800,000 underrepresented students (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2020). Johnson (2014) reported Title IV programs were created during the reauthorization of The Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1965. Title IV programs provide a pathway for students interested in attending post-secondary institutions. President

Johnson's administration was responsible for the inception of The Higher Education Act of 1965. Title IV serves underrepresented minorities, first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities.

Reverend Doctor Cordy Tindale (C.T.) Vivian was an influential figure in the Civil Rights Movement and he advocated beside other great leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis (Carter, 2015). According to Carter, Rev. Vivian advised Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama on Civil Rights issues. Rev. Vivian lectured on racial justice and democracy throughout the world. In November 2013, Rev. Dr. Vivian was honored for his vision and leadership in the fight for justice; he received the Nation's highest civilian honor-The Presidential Medal of Freedom (C.T. Vivian Leadership Institute, n.d.). Many are uninformed of Rev. Vivian's contribution to the Upward Bound program. Rev. Vivian created VISION, a program that later became Upward Bound (Reyes, 2020). Vivian designed, organized, and launched VISION in the summer of 1966. VISION was an educational program which helped 700 unqualified students in the south attend college on scholarships throughout the nation. VISION later became Upward Bound; a national program funded through the Department of Education. Upward Bound supports high school students from low-income and first-generation families to graduate and pursue college education, thus following the "Vision" of the late Rev. Dr. C.T. Vivian.

Low-income rural youth faced many obstacles in preparing to attend college (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004). The primary objective of the Upward Bound program is to prepare socially and economically disadvantaged youth. Grimard and Maddaus identified Upward Bound as a federally funded program which prepares high school

students from low-income families whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree to enter and complete a post-secondary education. Upward Bound began in 1964, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," and currently administered through the United States Department of Education (Johnson, 2014). Cahalan and Goodwin (2014), Jackson (2014), and Grimard and Maddaus (2004) all stated studies have shown students who participate in early intervention and college preparation programs such as Upward Bound have an increased chance of graduating college than those who do not. Researchers Ohrtman et al. (2016) supported college readiness programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear Up. They found these programs provided services and opportunities not often available to minority and low-income youth.

Upward Bound programs have been serving and assisting students and their families for well over 50 years. During TRIO campaigns, professional conferences, and workshops, countless proud Upward Bound program alum have shared their heartwarming success stories. Most of the alum shared “if they were not a member of Upward Bound, they would not be the successes they are today” while others reveal their stories to encourage TRIO staff to continue to do the work and be a support in the lives of the first-generation and low-income students. These stories encourage Upward Bound staff to not give up on the rebellious students, and not to forget to check up on the students with the 1.5 grade point average (GPA) as these are the populations that need the program the most (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2021b).

Youth serving organizations play potentially important roles for young participants to access and leverage networks (Dill & Ozer, 2019). Paul (2003) asserted

the change over from elementary to middle school is traumatic for many youth. The transition is often plagued by academic uncertainty and a decline in self-esteem, physical, intellectual, and social change. The authors sought to understand how urban youth utilize social capital as they navigate major oppressions and stressors (racism, poverty, educational inequalities, and neighborhood violence) as part of their development to adulthood. Social support and social leverage are the two key forms of network-based social capital examined throughout the study. Dill and Ozer (2019) identified social support as capital individuals can draw upon to “get by” or to cope with daily problems, and social leverage as social capital that helps people “get ahead” and affords them access to information, such as referrals to jobs, and advances their social mobility. Upward Bound and other youth-serving organizations are types of community-based organizations that use informal and formal educational and experiential strategies to offer a variety of support and programming for youth.

This study focused on the process of network-based social capital enactment at the East Oakland Youth Development Center (EOYDC). This ethnographic study evaluated 25 African American and Latinx young men and women between 12 and 20. Sixty percent of the participants were female and 80% identified as African American. Participants attended public middle school, high school, charter middle schools, Catholic high schools, General Educational Development (GED) students, or enrolled in colleges or 4-year universities. Each student participated in a 1-hour semistructured interview that focused on understanding the respondents’ future aspirations, experiences of EOYDC, and the types of network-based support available to them at EOYDC and in their neighborhoods. The authors developed detailed coding

systems and key themes emerged: the first, illustrated how youth access the activities and personal resources at EOYDC; next, how these activities and personal relationships were used to leverage social capital in the lives of young people; and ultimately, revealed the active work youth engage in, with the support of adult role models, to envision positive futures for themselves. Youth enacted a positive trajectory to do so and activated a network-based social capital (Dill & Ozer, 2019). The study results found EOYDC staff served as nonfamilial role models for youth, provided culturally relevant relationships with the youth, provided loving accountability, supported the youths' goal attainment, provided access to employment and educational resources, and enhanced the youth's self-esteem.

The study's findings determined presences and support contributed to the successful adolescent development in disadvantaged youth. EOYDC seeks adult staff members out as positive adult role models and mentors in their lives. These role models are credited with providing information, assistance, exposure, support, and encouragement to youth participants.

Overall, Upward Bound, TRIO Programs, and other youth-serving programs cannot meet their goals and objectives alone. They must be implemented and supported in conjunction with other efforts to reach academic standards for all K-12 students. They must hire high-quality elementary and secondary education teachers, counselors, and administrators and providing them the tools necessary to develop and assist the students (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). Working in unity will strengthen the efforts and services provided by the TRIO programs and the schools and may increase the students' success.

African American Female Experiences

Black females experience conflicts associated with dualism of their identities as women and Black (Paul, 2003). Adolescence is a period of normative developmental cognitive and physical changes. However, these changes often cause asynchronous challenges resulting from a marginalized racial status (Trask-Tate et al., 2010). This study examined the importance of family and the impact of social support on systems of psychological distress in African American girls. Low support in their academic environments, few opportunities for extracurricular activities, and increased exposure to racism and discrimination are a few challenges African American females encounter. However, Muhammad and Dixson (2008) signified Black females' educational successes are made in spite of their circumstances rather than because of them. Trask-Tate et al. (2010) found gender was another silent factor contributing to the onset of depression in minority females in addition to the other challenges. Young Black girls must be taught to love and value themselves and navigate a society that routinely conveys the message that her blackness makes her unlovely (VicHealth, 2015). The participants for this study were 136 female African Americans between the ages of 14 to 18. According to school records, 90% of the students received free or reduced lunch, categorized as "working poor" (Trask-Tate et al., 2010). Several scales were used as measurement tools in this study. The 34 Negative Life Events questionnaire (NLEs), which is a revised version of Coddington's Life Events Questionnaire was used to examine the negative responses. The Social Support Scale was used to measure youths' perceptions of support from individuals. The Ego-resiliency Scale which consisted of 14 items measured adaptability by uniting several personality attributes including

confidence, meaningful and active engagement in the world, a sense of mastery within several life domains, good interpersonal skills life domains, and good interpersonal skills (Trask-Tate et al., 2010). The final scale used was the Symptoms of Psychological Distress Scale, which measured participants' self-report of depressive symptoms such as anhedonia, feelings of hopelessness, and frequency of worry.

The impact of perceived support from particular family members revealed a statistically significant correlation between support from mothers and symptoms of psychological distress. Trask-Tate et al., (2010) found perceived support from both mothers and fathers was linked to fewer symptoms of psychological distress. Findings presented the important role of women in the lives of girls, the moderating role of father support between ego-resiliency and symptoms of psychological distress differentiates and highlights the influence of fathers on the healthy psychological development of adolescent girls.

Given that female African Americans are disproportionately the head of households, promoting their college success is crucial not only for them but also for their current and future families (Morales, 2008). In 2019, sixty percent of African American females classified as head of household (Goodman et al., 2021). Paul (2003) cautioned pervasive racism, which used so-called science to support flawed truism that Black women are aberrantly sexual and fertile, thus draining the economy. Morales (2008) stated obtaining a college degree is a big hope in bringing the low-income population to middle-class status, making studying resilience in this community crucial. In an investigation of eight years on 50 resilient male and female students, Morales (2008) sought to discover the significant differences, if any, that exist in the academic resilience

processes of high achieving low socioeconomic male and female college students of color. Each participant completed three 90-minute interviews. The protocol began with broad, general, open-ended questions posed to all participants. Thirty-one of the participants were female and 19 were male, with 30 self-identifying as African American and 20 as Latinx. Four percent of the participants was from a rural area. Morales (2008) found three distinctly female approaches to academic resilience arose from the data:

- (1) Females faced more resistance than males to the pursuit of their college and career goals, resulting in the need for them to overcome unique obstacles and challenges;
- (2) Females were more strongly motivated by their post-college professional goals than were males; and
- (3) When identifying influential mentors (both during high school and college), sharing the same gender of the potential mentor was significantly less important for the females than for the males. (p. 202)

The study's findings were definitive: among male students, 47% used concrete professional goals as motivators and 90% for females. Female participants would connect their current academic tasks to their future careers, much more so than the males. Morales (2008) found while the socioacademic phenomenon of academic resilience has not traditionally been characterized as a gender issue, noteworthy differences appear in how females experience their resilience. Morales asserted often, females of color have their entire families counting on their success, the need to support and promote that success becomes a social necessity. By understanding some of the ways that potentially resilient females experience the process of resilience, programs and policies can be designed to better meet the desired goals (Morales, 2008).

Grief and resilience live together, a lesson Former First Lady Michelle Obama stated she learned several times throughout her life (Obama, 2018). Few studies truly capture the amazing strength and resilience of Black females who admittedly encounter a large number of obstacles on the road to success (Paul & Araneo, 2019). Black females face more severe school punishments such as out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Paul (2003) indicated Black girls are not presently receiving equitable learning opportunities in schools. Despite all the obstacles in their way, Black females have still been able to make gains. Clark and Shi (2020) found economically disadvantaged Black girls complete high school at higher rates than their disadvantaged White peers. Graduation rates for low-income White girls are 5 to 6 percentage points lower than poorer Black girls.

Rural Students

Few studies have examined the college process of rural youth and the barriers they face accessing postsecondary education (Means et al., 2016). In 2018, rural youth accounted for 32% of the high school population (National Students Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). In this qualitative study, the researchers sought to understand how rural African American high school students experience the college-going process. Twenty-six high school students were interviewed, 17 females and nine males (Means et al., 2016). The researchers found the college and career aspirations of the students in the study was embedded in the context of rurality, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. The researchers identified three themes in the data: (a) the tension of staying or going: college and career aspirations and rurality; (b) pushed and encouraged without a road map; and (c) financial aid and academic barriers to higher

education. Bryan et al. (2020) all agree financial aid and academic barriers are obstacles to higher education. The findings were also consistent with other studies that found rural students to be conflicted in their decision to go off to college or stay in their community (Morton et al., 2018). Pushed and encouraged was another emerging theme in the study; the Upward Bound and other TRIO program staff have been credited for pushing and encouraging students to pursue their higher education careers (Pryor, 2018).

Students from rural communities face significant challenges due to low academic preparation, geographic isolation, and poor socioeconomic conditions (Morton et al., 2018). Rural students perceived these possible barriers when pursuing a college education. In 2010, about 19% of the United States population lived in a rural area (United States Census Bureau, 2021b). More than 9.3 million U.S. students attended a rural school in 2019 (Blad, 2020). According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2017), rural women are increasingly more highly educated than rural men, and educational attainment among rural Whites is higher than that of racial and ethnic minorities in rural areas. The researchers used Coleman's social capital theory to illustrate the economic concepts of rational action and human capital to explore and understand social systems and social organizations (Morton et al., 2018). Twenty-nine students agreed to participate in the study, 34% attended a rural high school. Using a semistructured interview protocol, focus group interviews captured the students' perceptions of their community, family, and school academic and social experiences. The study's findings indicated participants felt their town was small and boring, everyone knew one another, lacked opportunities, and had difficulties finding employment.

Educational opportunities were perceived to be limited due to the physical location of institutions; the nearest colleges were reported to be anywhere from 45 to 120 minutes away from their hometowns. Regarding economics, a greater presence of inheritance in rural area mom and pop shops and small family businesses abounded. Participants felt living in a rural town remained difficult due to limited resources.

Rosecrance et al. (2019) found students from rural Appalachia communities are more likely to graduate from high school but less likely to attend college than urban and suburban students. This community is characterized by a rich shared cultural heritage, including enduring values of familism, traditionalism, localism, and self-reliance, many of which influence attitudes toward education and vocation. Grimard and Maddaus, (2004) examined rural Upward Bound programs' efforts to help rural youth prepare for college, which illuminates several critical obstacles for these youth. The authors identified specific obstacles low-income rural youth face in preparing to go on to college as: financial concerns, poor academic preparation, availability of college information, and self-limiting beliefs surrounding postsecondary achievement. Hardré et al. (2007) concluded rural schools are a subgroup underrepresented in the literature. The researchers determined rural research is essential because rural schools often face serious economic and community resource constraints that place rural students at risk for low motivation and lack of success.

The primary objective of the Upward Bound program is to prepare socially and economically disadvantaged youth. In this mixed-methods study, the researchers examined the major obstacles low-income rural youth faced as they prepared to attend college and how they overcame those obstacles. The surveys and interviews explored

issues related to recruitment and retention as well as program impacts of the Upward Bound program at the University of Maine. The researchers analyzed survey data using descriptive statistics. Fifty-three of the 99 students in the Upward Bound program were surveyed, 39 females and 14 males. Study results indicated low-income rural students' primary obstacles in preparing for college were financial and social.

The first major obstacle was financial, both male and female students indicated they do not participate in Upward Bound because they felt they could make more money working during the summer. Although Upward Bound students have the opportunity to work in the afternoons while on campus for 6-weeks, students perceive they can make more money if they do not participate in the program. The second major obstacle to preparing for college by participating in Upward Bound was social. Students stated the length of the summer program was something that made them reluctant to apply. Leaving their families and significant others behind was much more of an issue for females than for males. Once students enrolled in the program, they began to directly experience the benefits of the Upward Bound program. These students perceived they benefited academically, financially, and socially. The students found the program helped them get into college 94.3%, improved his/her high school grades 75.4%, and they liked being on a college campus 73.5%.

The third major incentive to participate in the program was social reasons cited more frequently by students than by their guidance counselors and parents. Female students cited social reasons in the range of 41.0% to 69.2% and by males in the range of 14.2% to 42.9%. Students were asked overall did the Upward Bound program meet their expectations, 40.0% said, "yes" to this question, whereas 58.0% stated they felt

“somewhat satisfied with the program.” Only one student 2.0% out of 53 students felt dissatisfied with the program. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) revealed despite obstacles to college access related to personal and family income, family educational background, place of residence, and other issues, high school students in the federally funded Upward Bound programs in rural Maine went on to college in far greater numbers than similarly situated peers. The article is relevant to the research topic because the researchers addressed low-income students in rural settings overcoming obstacles to preparing for college. Because this study is over 17 years old, this topic needed to be readdressed.

School officials need to understand overall school experiences to provide school wide interventions to combat identified risks and improve the outcomes for rural students (Hoffman et al., 2017; Cotter et al., 2015). According to the National Student Clearinghouse (2019), during the 2018-2019 school year only 28% of rural high school seniors graduated compared to 60% in urban and 50% in suburban areas. Hoffman et al. (2017) sought to examine the perceptions and experiences of rural middle school youth and how these experiences influence their academic achievement. A sample of 2,462 middle school students was surveyed during the school day. Surveys was administered by school staff and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The data was collected as part of a communitywide needs assessment in six Appalachian counties in Ohio. The average age of respondents was 13; the majority was white, 88%, and female 51%. Approximately 49% of the respondents reported receiving free or reduced lunch.

The middle school version of the Community and Youth Collaborative Institute School Experience Scales (CAYCI-SES) was used to measure youths’ perceptions of their school experiences (Hoffman et al., 2017). Academic learning, school climate, and

youth development were the sections of the CAYCI-SES explored for the study. In the Academic Learning section, statements such as “I like the challenges of learning new things in school and my teachers monitor whether youths are learning regularly” was explored. Students’ academic motivations, support for learning, engagement, and enjoyment of learning at school were identified. The School Climate section of the CAYCI-SES explored the following: “I feel like I belong at my school, I feel safe getting to and from school, and at my school, all students are treated the same regardless of where they come from.” The Climate section of the CAYCI-SES measured school connectedness, safety, and diversity.

The Youth Development section of the CAYCI-SES incorporated social skills, parent involvement and support, family and community connections, and peer relationships. This section investigated if the student works well with others, if the students’ parents push them to work hard in school, if the student feels they are an important part of their community and are their friends—people they can trust. The final section explored in the Academic Achievement CAYCI-SES is self-reported grades. Students were asked to report their grades from mostly A’s to mostly F’s. Students who reported mostly A’s and B’s were included in the high achievement categories while those who reported any other grade category were included in the low achievement category. Descriptive statistics for academic learning, school climate, youth development, and the high and low achievement logistic regression were used to examine and explore which school experiences significantly predicted high academic achievement.

The study results indicated the 2,462 youth who completed the CAYCI-SES 77% reported high achievement, compared to 23% that reported low academic achievement. Nearly 51% of female participants not receiving free or reduced lunch 56% reported higher achievement. Approximately 55.8% of male students which 66.6% received free or reduced lunch, reported lower academic achievement. No significant differences were identified by race or age. CAYCI-SES scores were lower for youth reporting low academic achievements compared to those reporting high achievement. Social Skills, Parent Involvement and Support, and Peer Relationships were highly reported in youth reporting high achievement whereas; Diversity and School Connectedness were the lowest rated. Amongst low achieving youth Social Skills, Parent Involvement and Support, and Academic Press were most highly rated compared to Diversity, School Connectedness, and Academic Motivation were the lowest rated (Hoffman et al., 2017). The findings indicated well-developed social skills, high levels of parental involvement, and positive perceptions of peer relationships are key strengths in high-achieving rural youth. Rural youth faced individual, peer, family, and community risks that can hinder their academic achievements. To improve their academic and development outcomes, rural school officials must understand the school experiences of the youth to provide services and support to enhance their achievements.

Family, school, and community are factors that influence rural African American student's educational aspirations. Approximately 20% of rural Americans identify as people of color, and 40% of that subpopulation identify as African American (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2021). Williams-Johnson and Cain reported in 2015 about 77% of African American rural adults reported completing high school or equivalent however,

only 7% earned an associate degree and 10% earned a bachelor's degree or higher. This study explored how educational aspiration is an important factor in understanding the motivations of students to attend and persist in higher education.

Family members, both parents, and extended family influence the educational aspiration of rural African American students. Family members helped instill a desire to attend higher education at a young age. Family members provided emotional support for the student to pursue higher education, however, family members lacked a clear direction on how the students can obtain a higher education. School counselors, teachers, and coaches are also noted for influencing rural African American students (Williams-Johnson & Cain, 2021). School poverty is a major influence in rural schools. Rural schools often have limited access to advanced coursework and quality curriculum compared to urban and suburban schools. Often rural African American students limited their educational aspirations because they were inadequately prepared academically. Applaudingly, rural African American students who participated in pre-college and leadership experiences were most influenced to pursue a higher education.

Williams-Johnson and Cain (2021) stated people, religion, and poverty are three influential community-level factors that inspire rural African American students' educational aspirations. African American students were found to seek out information pertaining to college from coaches, religious leaders, and college publications. Rural African American students, especially those living in the Southeastern United States, discovered hope for future prosperity and support from religious services and churches. Poverty is another community factor that challenged rural African American students' aspirations for their education. Williams-Johnson and Cain stated rural areas

often lead urban areas in poverty dating from the 1960s. The rural South faced some of the highest poverty rates in the United States, and African Americans had the highest poverty rate 33% when compared to all rural ethnic groups in 2017. Poverty often poses dilemmas such as low access to employment, transportation, and education, which further hindered a person's chance of overcoming poverty. The recommendation of this study indicated there is a need for multifaceted solutions to unravel the efforts of race and place secure affirming educational pathways for rural African American students. College recruitment and admissions staff must consider the close ties rural African American students have with their families, school professionals, and community members then incorporate them in the recruitment and admissions process. Student affairs professionals should also make an effort to involve rural African American students on their campuses. Evolvement in Black Student Unions, fraternities, sororities, and other social organizations were found to increase student retention and degree completion in rural students.

Barriers/Achievement Gaps

Black children are suffering in the United States and face many barriers. Franklin (2007) explained the plight of Black children in the following manner:

Every five seconds during the school day, a Black public-school student is suspended, and every forty-six seconds during the school day, a Black high school student drops out. Every minute, a Black child is arrested, and a Black baby is born to an unmarried mother. Every three minutes, a Black child is born into poverty. Every hour, a Black baby dies. Every four hours, a Black child or youth dies from an accident, and every five hours, one is a homicide victim. And every

day, a Black young person under twenty-five dies from HIV infection and a Black child or youth under twenty commits suicide. (p. 219)

It is crucial to address the alarming statistics concerning the plight of Black children living in America.

Implementing programs that create the protective factors that foster resilience and developmental resources for students at risk of negative academic, social/emotional, and college/career outcomes are essential to student success (Bryan et al., 2020). The Council for Opportunity in Education (2021a) affirmed the growing achievement gap in our country is detrimental to our success as a nation. There is a tremendous gap in educational attainment between America's highest and lowest income students despite similar talents and potential (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2021a).

The significant gap between African American, Latinx, and White students has been well documented in public education (Brock, 2010; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008; Vega et al., 2015). The gaps between students of color and White students suggest the public-school system is one of many systems failing to meet their educational needs. This qualitative investigation examined the factors 18 African American and Latinx students considered to be barriers toward a positive educational experience (Vega et al., 2015). The factors were consistent with invitational education theory and the “five P’s.” People, places, policies, programs, and processes were identified as aspects that warranted improvements in their schooling experiences. The study utilized Purkey and Novak’s theory of invitational education as a guiding conceptual framework (Vega et al., 2015). In the sample, 10 students identified as African American and eight as Latinx. Of the 18 students studied, 11 was Upward Bound students who affirmed peers, teachers,

counselors, poverty, and safety was barriers to their educational experiences. The researchers found Upward Bound staff and services served as positive educational factors.

Owens (2013) affirmed college preparation programs occupy a unique space in the educational field. This study is useful to the research because it featured detailed illustrations of the experiences provided by the Upward Bound program. The study's strengths supported the findings of previous similar research that Upward Bound programs serves as a positive educational factor (Morton et al., 2018). The researchers, however, only studied students in urban public schools, so no information was provided for the rural population. African American students have different educational experiences from Latinx students; therefore, it would have been helpful to indicate the differences. As further relevance to the research topic, this study examined what minority students perceived to be barriers toward a positive educational experience.

A need exists for college readiness programs designed to increase the participation of students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education. Le et al., (2016) discovered numerous studies had shown minority, low-income, and first-generation college students have lower baccalaureate attainment rates than non-minority, higher-income, or nonfirst-generation students. The researchers evaluated the St. Louis College Bound Program. Comparisons of students' academic achievement was evaluated before and after their participation in the program to see if program services allowed them a better gateway to higher education. To provide students with the necessary support needed to enroll in college, programs like Upward Bound offered a range of services such as tutoring, mentoring, standardized test prep, college

visitation, financial aid, financial literacy awareness, and exposure to cultural activities. When a student has a real opportunity to participate in a college visitation and see how it would feel to be one of those students, they have a goal to work towards. Le et al. (2016) indicated many minority students who are not privileged to receive college readiness services have inadequate academic preparation, lack of knowledge about financial aid, limited access to the college application process, and limited social support.

Vega et al. (2015) shared some additional barriers in pursuing higher education for some minority students. The students felt administrators, teachers, and counselors did not care about them. While all the students reported high career aspirations, they encountered barriers that made their educational goals difficult to navigate, according to Vega et al. (2015). The students reported some teachers did not care if they understood the information, and they wondered why they were teachers. The researchers discovered 18 African American and Latinx students perceived barriers, half of the students reported they lost opportunities because of their school counselors. While some Upward Bound students did not find their school counselors to be very helpful, they had a unique advantage over their peers. They received college preparatory assistance outside of school from Upward Bound counselors and staff. The students felt like their school counselors were too busy to see them, did not do anything, never spoke to them, and did not know them, which was a complete contrast from their Upward Bound staff members. The average Upward Bound student-staff ratio is 25:1, allowing for more personalized services and attention when assisting participants (Vega et al., 2015).

African American students perceived American College Testing (ACT) requirements, lack of support systems, and access to financial aid as barriers to

enrollment in higher education (Davidson et al., 2020). While many students will encounter barriers, this study focused on the effects of standardized testing requirements, support systems, and the role of financial aid on African American students' college enrollment. African American students traditionally score lower than White students on mathematics, science, and reading. African American students are less prepared for standardized tests which is often a requirement for higher education admissions (Davidson et al., 2020). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2021) in 2018 Black students scored an average of 16.9 on the ACT exams compared to White students who scored an average of 22.2 points. The researchers interviewed a high school counselor, a college recruiter, and set up two focus groups for White students and Black students. The first focus group consisted of six White students; five of the participants were female and one male. The African American focus group consisted of six participants, three females and three males. All of the students shared similar geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The guiding research questions for the study was as follows: How does increased ACT requirements create barriers for African American college enrollment? How do home and school support systems impact African American college enrollment? and What role does financial aid play in African American college enrollment? The college recruiter responded to the first question by stating African American students generally scored lower on the ACT exam in math and reading compared to White students. As a result, many African American students required remedial courses in those subjects (Davidson et al., 2020). The recruiter also affirmed African American students only took the ACT during their junior year when the state provided fee waivers.

In contrast, White students take the test multiple times to increase their scores. The White focus group respondents confirmed they took the ACT multiple times to increase their scores. However, some African American students shared they could only afford to take the ACT or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) one time. In response to identifying differences in the support provided to African American and White families, the school counselor stated the college admissions process was more difficult for African American families. In both focus groups, students perceived higher education with great importance (Davidson et al., 2020). The White students stated they received assistance from their families. In contrast, African American students were forced to navigate the admissions process independently or help from outside of the home. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021b), Upward Bound programs must provide students assistance and guidance with postsecondary education admission. The researchers found while the African American students' parents wanted them to attend college, almost all of the students had to pay for college on their own using loans or other financial aid. The White focus group students indicated they had financial support from their parents to make up the balance after scholarships and other forms of financial aid.

The study's findings indicated students whose parents held a college degree were more likely to enroll in higher education and receive family support. While African American families valued education and provided emotional support, they were less likely to provide financial support than White families. Similarly, both focus groups' parents emphasized the importance of education. However, the pressure from African American parents was greater. All interviews stated students received informational support from their high schools or perceived colleges concerning enrollment (Davidson et

al., 2020). The importance of financial aid was identified as a major barrier for enrollment by all study participants. To help combat the barriers, the high school counselor revealed the school provided Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) nights, where they answered questions and helped parents complete the application, and hosted scholarship workshops. The researchers found most students are willing to finance their education because it is very important to them. The implications of the study included increasing awareness of the roadblocks for African American students at high schools and college campuses.

Resilience

The term resilience means the tendency to “rebound or recoil,” “to spring back,” “the power of recovery” (Garmezy, 1991a, p. 459). Resiliency is the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events that provide the individual with additional protective and coping skills than before the disruption that results from the event (Richardson et al., 1990). Resiliency is the ability to recover from or adjust to problems, adversity, and stressors in life (Evans-Winters, 2014). In the inception of research on resilience, researchers studied competent Black children in the urban ghettos exposed to stressors of poverty and prejudice. The findings indicated a “triad of factors (1) dispositional attributes in the child, (2) family cohesion and warmth, and (3) support figures in the environment and the schools who can serve as identification models for the child” (Garmezy & Rutter 1988, p. 74).

Despite the stressors and adversities in their lives, these Black children had a positive sense of self and believed they were capable. Morales (2008) indicated academic resilience is the process and results are part of the life story of an academically

successful individual, despite obstacles that prevent many others with the same background from succeeding. In this study, Evans-Winters (2014) found resilience is always defined in relation to risk factors. African American females who live in areas with crime, increased high school dropout, low high school completion, drugs, and teenage pregnancy are considered high-risk groups. Although, many African American females come from those high-risk areas they may succeed due to educators, families, and communities that strengthen the protective processes and promote resiliency. Bryan et al. (2020) recognized the capacity for academic resilience varied from one student to the next. They grew or declined over time based on the presence of individual and environmental protective factors or processes.

Evans-Winters (2014) emphasized resilient African American girls are more likely to be engaged in community organizations such as a religious institutions or afterschool programs. Afterschool programs like Upward Bound provide students a positive alternative to participate in rather than engage in gangs, crime, and drugs. In spite of lower academic achievement, African American girls possess higher levels of self-esteem than their White female counterparts (Evans-Winters, 2014). The author found compared to Black males; Black girls are educationally resilient. According to Evans-Winters, Black girls persisted through schooling, achieved academically, and strived to change their circumstances and the political, economic, and social circumstances of those around them. This study provided strong justification for enrolling African American females in the Upward Bound program. With guidance, services, and support, these African American female students have a greater opportunity for academic success.

In discussions on how to promote academic success among poor urban African American K-12 students at risk of failure, the voice of the students has gone unheard (Williams & Portman, 2014). Few have explored what African American students deem is needed for their academic successes despite facing adversities. This study investigated what urban African American students felt was important to their success to provide insight for educators, school administrators, parents, and community members. The information learned from the students will provide insight to create, modify, or remove existing policies, programs, and services to promote student resilience and academic success.

According to the Children's Defense Fund (2020), over 3 million Black children (33.1%) were poor. Poor children are more likely to have poor academic achievement, drop out of high school, become unemployed, experience economic hardship, and be involved in the criminal justice system. As the number of poor Black children continues to rise in the United States, a critical need exists for insights into identifying factors for nurturing their academic success despite the adversities they face. Williams and Portman (2014) conducted a qualitative study that examined the retrospective appraisal of five high-achieving urban African American high school graduates from high-risk urban areas. The researchers sought to understand the urban African American students' need to succeed academically despite perceived social, financial, and educational barriers. Participants for this study were five self-identified African American students, four female and one male, ages from 18 to 20 years old. The participants were recruited from a Midwestern HBCU. Participants took part in a 1-hour individual interview as well as a 1.5-hour focus group. A five-question moderator's guide was developed to engage the

participants in dialogue regarding their recommendations for promoting academic success among poor urban African American K-12 students at risk of failure (2014).

Williams and Portman (2014) reported the six emergent themes arising from the data: shared responsibility for educational outcomes, being a part of the solution, parental involvement by any means, natural support systems, school counselors as change agents, and community collaboration to raise a scholar. The findings determined participants believed schools, families, and community members need to coordinate resources and services for students. Participants indicated students should be dedicated and self-driven to succeed academically and in life. Parents need to talk with their children about school, which shows that students value education and keep parents aware of what is going on in their lives. Students described why some parents work two or more jobs to make ends meet and might not have time to be involved in their child's academic activities, it is still important for a parent to communicate their support. Kids must know help is available.

No matter the circumstances, students should have natural support systems such as teachers, coaches, relatives, or neighbors who can help and support them. Unfortunately, participants emphasized school counselors are not involved. They felt counselors took the counseling out of the profession. Participants stated counselors should help students with their problems inside and outside of the school by advocating for them and empowering students with the resources, skills, and tools they will need to face the challenges poor urban students typically encounter.

Finally, participants highlighted that community members can create programs and extracurricular activities that aim to enhance their academic abilities by initiating tutoring programs, back-to-school block parties, internship opportunities, and part-time

jobs. Doing so might lower the number of African American adolescents who participate in unlawful activities for financial gain. The study results illuminated the voices of the pupils presented unique insights into how to promote student achievement and reliance among low-income urban African American students. Furthermore, the comments can serve as an eye-opener for counselors in evaluating their school counseling programs and efforts to promote resilience. The results generated several recommendations for improving interventions, services, and support for urban African American K-12 students (Williams & Portman, 2014).

Summary

Limited studies suggest connections between young African American females, rural Upward Bound students, and their resilience to overcome adversities. Morales (2008) and Evans-Winters (2014) established despite stressors in their lives, African American females had a positive sense of self and were educationally resilient. Moreover, African American female students tend to have a more distinct sense of ethnic self, and they must learn to navigate their social and academic environment to succeed (Williams & Portman, 2014; Evans-Winters, 2014; Bryan et al., 2020; Morales, 2008). Young African American females must learn to navigate their environment with their stressors, barriers, and adversities to recover towards a resilient state. Living in high crime areas, increased high school dropout, low high school completion, drugs, and violence affect student resilience (Evans-Winters, 2014). As previously stated, there is limited research on young African American female students in rural Upward Bound Programs; hence, there is a need to continue to explore the effects of resilience to empower and explore the needs of this population in the United States (Davidson et al.,

2020; Williams & Portman, 2014; Morales, 2008). Therefore, the study made an effort to expand the knowledge of this population by exploring young female African American rural Upward Bound students in the Southeastern United States. Furthermore, Richardson et al.'s (1990) Resilience model, explored how they perceive resilience to their success.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Upward Bound program staff, services, and resources have impacted educational aspirations, postsecondary educational progress, and students' persistence from disadvantaged backgrounds (McElroy & Armesto, 1998; Council for Opportunity in Education, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021b; Epps et al., 2016). However, African American female youth face several barriers as they matriculate through the educational pipeline (Pinckney et al., 2019). Insight into the experiences of the young African American female Upward Bound students merited the need for this research. The purpose of the basic interpretive qualitative research is to understand how African American females characterize their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program in the Southeastern United States and fill a void in the education gap. The methodology for the research study was presented. The research design was outlined along with the research questions, research site, data collection, and analyses, and concluded with the validity and trustworthiness sections.

Research Design

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), the basic interpretive qualitative research design is one of the most used designs in education, as it seeks to address meaning from participants constructed experiences. Through a basic qualitative method, the researcher sought to understand the experiences, outcomes, relationships, lives, journeys, successes, and or failures of young African American rural Upward Bound female participants. The qualitative research design was appropriate for this study as its

primary purpose is to interpret their experiences, understand how they construct their world, and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Capturing experiences is most effectively done through open-ended questions rather than quantitative surveys, therefore the researcher was part of the study as she interacted with participants to collect data (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ 1. How do African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program?
- RQ 2. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?
- RQ 3. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants regarding the program's influence on their personal growth development?

Research Setting

I recruited participants from one rural Upward Bound Program in Thomaston, Georgia. The Thomaston Upward Bound program is housed at Atlanta Metropolitan State College Campus in the heart of the city. However, the participants in the study live in rural Thomaston, GA. Thomaston is approximately an hour and a half south of Atlanta. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), the population of Thomaston, Georgia, was 8,752, with 57.6% White and 36.9% Black. The median household income in 2019 was \$28,906. Women made up 56.4% of the population. From 2015-2019, 79.0% of the population had obtained a high school diploma; however,

only 17.4% obtained a bachelor's degree (United States Census Bureau, 2022).

Thomaston, Georgia, only has one public high school with approximately 1,224 students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). The Thomaston Upward Bound program receives funds to serve 58 students and currently serves 58 youth. There are 43 African American female students enrolled in grades 9 through 12. These facts help ensure the study's target population was present in the Thomaston Upward Bound Program.

Data Collection

I collected qualitative data for the study through virtual online interviews. Additionally, this section included data collection protocols, sampling procedures, participant selection, and consent.

Consent to Participate

I recruited participants immediately after VSU's IRB approval (Appendix F). Participants' parents signed their parental consent form, and minors signed their assent forms before the interview began. I asked participants to create their pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Participants and their parents received a copy of their consent forms. In addition, at the beginning of each interview, a shortened version of the informed consent was read, and I verbally asked participants to consent; this ensured participants knew the confidentiality, benefits, and risks associated with the study. See Appendix D for the parental consent form and Appendix E for the verbal consent form.

Sampling Procedures and Participant Selection.

Patton (2015) indicated purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases. Due to the study's scope, criterion sampling a purposeful sampling technique was

applied to recruit participants. This sampling technique used in the study ensured the sample provided rich qualitative data about the experiences of individuals who share specific criteria. To provide a variety of experiences within this population, participants had the following requirements to participate in this study: the participants must be female, African American, and participate in an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. The study focused on African American female students in grades 10 through 12 who have been in the rural Upward Bound program for a minimum of one academic and summer year. Each participant has received Upward Bound services, including tutoring, mentoring, career and personal counseling, exposure to cultural events, and other educational assistance necessary for advancing students through the educational pipeline. Selected participants have also participated in the Upward Bound program's summer component, located on a four-year college campus in Georgia. I employed an online Qualtrics form to ensure that interested participants meet the noted criteria to participate in the study.

Interviews

The purpose of interviews is to ensure rich qualitative data is collected. I conducted interviews using the Zoom platform due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and social distance guidelines. Zoom interviews have been viewed as a useful data collection tool. According to Archibald et al. (2019), Zoom interviews are commonly considered above other conventional interviewing methods, such as telephone, face-to-face, and other videoconferencing services. Ary et al. (2019) informed qualitative interviews have the advantage of supplying large amounts of in-depth data. They provide the meaning of events people are involved in and allow for immediate follow-up and

clarification. Conducting open-ended semistructured interviews with participants allowed them to provide detailed stories, experiences, and specific events or actions. The interview provided a platform for participants to tell the stories in their own words. The detailed firsthand accounts from the participants provided valuable information for answering the research questions. During the interview, I took handwritten notes. To reflect on each interview, I wrote memos immediately following each interview.

Data Analysis

Maxwell (2013) indicated data analysis and data collections must be done simultaneously in qualitative studies. Maxwell also expressed an experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately following the first interview or observation. I recorded the Zoom interviews and transcribed them automatically through the Zoom platform. At the close of each recording, the Zoom application compressed and stored the recording on the computer. The processing and storing may sometimes have errors and, therefore, potential loss of data. To prevent possible loss of data, I also audio recorded interviews using an Android cellphone. I verified the auto-transcription from the Zoom application to ensure verbatim transcript accuracy. Once each interview was transcribed, I deleted it from saved areas to protect the participants' privacy.

I began data analysis immediately following the completion of the first questionnaire by the first participant. Data analysis consisted of coding interview data according to procedures described by Miles et al. (2014). Maxwell (2013) suggested writing memos after each interview to facilitate reflection and analytic insight. I coded memos and used them later to further develop ideas. I wrote memos after each interview to better understand the experiences of the participants.

Saldaña (2016) suggested preparing data for coding gives you more familiarity with the contents and initiates a few basic analytic processes; it is “warming up” before the more detailed work begins (p. 18). In conducting the initial round of data analysis from the raw data, I collected information from the interview and the demographic surveys of each participant. I read each transcript to familiarize myself with the contents.

For the data analysis, a narrative coding method is the most appropriate to interpret, identify and code themes and make meaning of the data collected (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña affirmed narrative coding is suitable for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of participants through storytelling. I analyzed the narratives to capture a rich, detailed description of the participant's life and highlight the participant's progress. Saldaña found narrative coding applies literary elements and analysis principles to qualitative text, often in stories. This helped the researcher make meaning out of the narrative of each individual as well as assist in a cross-case analysis to determine shared themes and experiences.

The participants were actively engaged in the study and reflected on their experiences. Observations were recorded through a comprehensive reading of the interview transcripts and extensive journaling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, I wrote memos during the narrative analysis and transcriptions, as it was vital in the narrative stories and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

For the initial data analysis, I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet codebook to categories the themes. I applied Creswell's (2014) guide and protocol to construct the data, which involved reading through the information, coding the data, and developing a description and thematic analysis from the codes. I precoded the raw data by “circling,

highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 20). Narrative coding allowed for the stories and experiences of the young African American Upward Bound students in a rural setting to be told in their own words.

Saldaña (2016) contended most qualitative researchers in education would generate between 80-100 codes organized into 15-20 categories and subcategories and eventually integrate into five to seven major concepts. The procedure used to conduct the second round of analysis was pattern coding. Pattern codes are explanatory and allowed for “emergent themes, configuration, or explanation” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). Pattern codes pull together a lot of materials from first cycle codes into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña emphasized pattern coding is appropriate for condensing large amounts of data into smaller atypical units, developing major themes, examining social and human patterns and relationships, forming theoretical constraints and processes, and generating common themes. I reviewed and evaluated interview transcripts to ensure all emergent themes had been included in the initial coding process to generate common themes from the participant interviews.

To assure the initial and the secondary procedures generated credible and sufficiently deep answers for the research questions, participants were selected who had a great amount of experience in the Upward Bound program. The demographic survey provided background information on each participant. The interviews yielded different levels of data. As the interviews progressed, the data provided a deeper understanding of each participants’ experiences. By combining the demographic and interview questions

results, I gained a clearer and deeper understanding of each participant and their journey in the Upward Bound program.

Ethical Concerns

“Ethics begins with the concepts of the research project and ends with how we represent and share with others what we have learned” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 313). Due to the sensitivity of including minors in the study, I obtained informed assent from students and consent from their parents. In addition, approval from the Valdosta State University (VSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought. See Appendix F for VSU’s IRB paperwork. Creswell (2014) advised using aliases or pseudonyms for individuals or places. Therefore, to protect participants against potential identity threats, I used pseudonyms for each participant. I informed each participant about the focus of the study and their rights pertaining to their participation. Furthermore, I gave each participant the opportunity to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the expectations of the study. Creswell recommended researchers have their research plans reviewed and approved by the institutional review board (IRB) on their college or university campus. The approval ensures all human subjects’ rights are protected in accordance with all federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

I read the consent form to the participants and asked them to sign the form verifying their consent to participate and acknowledge their understanding that the study was strictly voluntary. I provided participants a copy of the consent form and I informed them of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Protecting the participant’s identity and information was vital to ensure data collected remained anonymous, and

contact information was not released. Participants selected their own pseudonym to strengthen confidentiality and assist with identifying themselves in the study transcripts. In addition, I allowed participants to review final transcripts to protect their identity and confirm the accuracy of the information.

Researcher Bias

Researcher bias is an internal threat to validity in the study. Ary et al. (2019) referred to the experimenter effect as an unintentional effect the researcher has on the study, personal characteristics such as gender, race, age, and position. Researcher bias is identified based on my values, background, and position as a TRIO Director. I have worked with the Upward Bound director for over 13 years; therefore, we are good friends as well as colleagues. I have first-hand experience working with Upward Bound students and being a former participant in a TRIO program. These personal experiences could have threatened the study's outcome had I not been conscious of the bias. To minimize and eliminate these threats, I acknowledged the threats, wrote a memo about them, and reported the threats in the research.

My life experiences have influenced the interest to study how African American females characterize their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program. I identified strongly with the demographics of the participants in the study. I, too, qualified for a TRIO program, meaning neither of my parents graduated from college and I came from a low-income household. While I was not a member of an Upward Bound program, I was a member of an undergraduate TRIO program. I received services similar to those obtained by Upward Bound students, including summer residential program, college, testing fee waivers, tutoring, mentoring, academic advisement, academic and cultural

field trips, and stipends. As a TRIO participant who received many benefits and had a rewarding experience in the program, I may be biased in assuming participants' experiences in the Upward Bound program may be similar.

I was mindful of how I approached the topic to ensure my personal biases did not manifest during this study. Participants were more likely to be truthful and share their experiences with me as we share Upward Bound backgrounds. Nevertheless, another major researcher bias was I am currently a director for a Talent Search TRIO program. I have worked with several TRIO programs and in higher education since 2001. Furthermore, I work very closely with the Upward Bound program from which the participants are being recruited. I was biased in assuming the students' experiences were positive and may not have wanted to highlight negative aspects of the program. However, validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference but integrity (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, to maintain the integrity of the study, I reported the findings of the research as voiced by the participants.

Validity and Trustworthiness

It was important to identify potential validity threats or sources of bias for the research, and I acknowledged and addressed them (Maxwell, 2013). Several internal validity threats could have undermined the quality and volume of data acquired for this qualitative research study investigating ways young African American female students experience the process of going through an Upward Bound program in a rural setting.

The experimenter effect or researcher bias is an internal threat to validity in a study. Ary et al. (2019) referred to the experimenter effect as an unintentional effect the researcher has on the study, personal characteristics such as gender, race, age, and

position. Experimental mortality (attrition) is another possible threat. Selected participants could decide to discontinue their participation in a study should data collection take significantly longer than expected (Ary et al., 2019). To minimize this threat, during this study, all participants were contacted regularly. Attrition was monitored to make sure if a participant dropped out of the study, it was due to chance factors and not characteristics of the participant or the experiment (Ary et al., 2019). Not including negative or discrepant information is the last potential threat that may undermine the quality and volume of data acquired in a study. Creswell (2014) emphasized by presenting contrary evidence, the account becomes realistic and more valid. Roberts (2010) used the term “trustworthiness” to refer to the concept of validity. She found it is the credibility factor that helps the reader trust the data analysis. To validate findings, the researcher used triangulation of participant interviews to build themes, member checking, and employ an external auditor to review the completed project (Creswell, 2014). Instrumentation bias, such as asking the wrong questions, can also threaten validity in a study.

Another potential threat was the subject effect, which is the subject trying to impress the researcher by answering in a manner they believe they are supposed to respond (Ary et al., 2019). To minimize this threat, I tried to select qualified participants who were never my students and with whom I had limited contact or interaction. Also, I informed the participants at the beginning of each interview there were no right or wrong answers. The goal of the study was to learn about their experiences which would help minimize or eliminate the threat. Providing rich, thick descriptions helped combat observational bias. The discussion helped transport readers to the setting and give

discussion an element of shared experiences; this procedure added to the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation and Member-Checking

I used triangulation and member-checking to ensure participants' consistency and validity of data interpretation. I used triangulation to control research bias and assist in establishing the validity of my interpretations of the collected data. Patton (1999a) defined triangulation of sources as the examination of "the consistency of different data sources within the same method" (p. 1193). Triangulation was helpful to the researcher. It assisted in overcoming skepticism which is common to singular methods of qualitative research (Patton, 1999b). The instruments I used for triangulation in this study were demographic questionnaires, interviews, and member-checking. I employed member-checking by providing each participant a copy of their transcribed interviews and my analysis. Maxwell (2013) described member-checking as a technique for establishing the validity of an account. By soliciting feedback about data and conclusions from the people being studied, member-checking provided participants the opportunity to confirm, correct, add to, or challenge the researcher's interpretations of the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations

There are limitations and delimitations to the study. A limitation was focus occurred on youth attending one high school in a rural area and not those in metropolitan areas. I purposefully selected participants from one rural Upward Bound Program. The Upward Bound director provided me a list of eligible participants and only the views of selected young African American females were examined. Participant responsiveness and openness in the answers they shared were critical. Ultimately, success depended on

the participants' willingness to complete the data collection instruments (questionnaire and interview). A delimitation of the study is I conducted interviews in a virtual manner instead of face-to-face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Another delimitation of the study was participants familiarity with me; therefore, they may have answered based on what they perceived I wanted to hear and not what they experienced in the program. Responses to the same questions asked by a person not associated with the program may have resulted in different answers. However, their responses may have been more in-depth because of their familiarity with me. A further, delimitation of the study is while Upward Bound is a program designed to assist students' academic success throughout high school, I did not analyze or measure students' grades or transcripts. Instead, for this qualitative study, only the perception in relation to their academics was portrayed.

Researcher Interviewer

Maxwell (2013) explained the relationship a researcher has with a participant in their study is complex. According to Maxwell (2013), "in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationship is how the research gets done" (p. 91). I am a TRIO alum and a director of a TRIO program, which might have influenced how participants replied. Therefore, the following sections explore the role of the researcher as the interviewer.

I was born in Port Au Prince, Haiti but lived most of my life in the United States. All my K-12 education was in the United States; however, English was my second language. While my parents only have grade school educations from a foreign country, they valued education. They instilled the importance of obtaining an advanced degree in my siblings and me. As a result of English being my second language, I struggled in K-

12. I received below-average grades in primary school and average grades in middle and high school. However, I fell in love with education as an undergraduate student at Buffalo State College in 2000. It was there where I excelled in my coursework and became an above average and exceptional student. In 2002, I was introduced to a TRIO Program (Talent Search) and became an advocate for higher education. I was accepted into the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement TRIO Program during my undergraduate studies and became an advocate for the importance of TRIO programs. Despite struggles in my formative educational upbringing and humble beginnings, I received my Bachelor's in Social Work (BSW) in 2004 and a Master's in Social Work (MSW) in 2005 via the Advanced Standing Program at the University of Buffalo on a full fellowship. Proudly, I have over 18 years of professional experience in higher education, working with various student groups, including Upward Bound and Talent Search participants. I am a first-generation African American female and a proud TRIO alum.

Summary

In summary, I conducted a basic interpretive qualitative research to investigate the way young African American female students experience the process of going through an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. I recruited seven participants from a rural Upward Bound program in the Southeastern United States. I conducted Zoom interviews and transcribed them, coded the data, and generated themes, which provided insight into the research topic. The fundamental goal of the research was to provide a platform for the participants to share their lived experiences as Upward Bound participants, in ways that resonate with readers and provide insight into the needs of future students as they

matriculate through the educational pipeline. Chapter IV presents findings from coded themes of participants' personal experiences.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Student participation in college preparatory programs affects persistence and academic success (Cahalan & Goodwin, 2014) Grimard and Maddaus (2004) stated studies have shown students who participate in early intervention and college preparation programs, such as Upward Bound, have an increased chance of graduating college than those who do not. Researchers Ohrtman et al. (2016) supported college readiness programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gear Up. They found these programs provide services and opportunities not often available to minority and low-income youth. The Upward Bound program keeps students engaged and motivated as they matriculate through high school (Evans-Winters, 2014).

Muhammad and Dixson (2008) described the African American high school female as academically ranked in the middle of the pack although her performance is centered around a lower mean test score. She largely represents the working class, including the working poor. On most measures, her academic ability is not because of a particularly beneficial environment, but in spite of constraints. She is just as likely as her peers to receive academic honors, recognition for good attendance and service to the community. She is more likely to engage at school beyond the curriculum and participate in math and science fairs. She is not afraid of a challenging curriculum and is most likely to be enrolled in a college preparatory track. Therefore, research on the African American female student experience positively affecting their persistence in a precollege program must be performed to effectively aid this student population (Le et al., 2016).

Precollege programs are unique as their primary goal is to provide young people with the skills needed to be successful in college (Hetherington, 2020). Female students take advantage of the services of precollege programs on a larger scale compared to their male counterparts explaining the growing female advantage in college completion (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). The present study examined the experiences and perceptions to provide insight into the female African American student who would benefit from a precollege program.

Moreover, researchers suggest Upward Bound programs provide a positive educational impact on at-risk students. Therefore, researchers and educators must consider these programs through different lenses to understand how they may enhance student support and student success. The literature lacks studies exploring the experiences of African American females in Upward Bound programs in the rural areas; however, the present study helps fill in the literature gap with much needed information. Through a basic interpretive qualitative research design, this study sought to understand ways young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program. The following research questions guided this dissertation study.

RQ 1. How do African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program?

RQ 2. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?

RQ 3. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants regarding the program's influence on their personal growth development?

These research questions provided the groundwork to conduct interviews with seven participants. I scheduled each interview for 45-60 minutes although most interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Each participant shared her lived experiences through her own lens. The open-ended interview protocol was based on Seidman's (2013) standards to capture their context to understand their experiences as a participant in an Upward Bound Program in a rural setting (see Appendix A). The latter questions of the interview helped participants reconstruct and make meaning of their experiences. Using various excerpts and using their personal lens, the seven participants are described below.

Crystal: "I Love School; I Like Learning; School Makes Me Happy"

Crystal is a rising 11th-grade African American female student attending Upson-Lee High School. While she is only in the 10th grade, she hopes to attend Gordon State College or Mercer University to study Marine Biology immediately following high school graduation. Crystal has maintained a 3.8 high school GPA. She is a proud Upward Bound Scholar and has been in the program for two years.

Crystal was born and raised in Thomaston, Georgia. She is 16 years old. She lives with her mother and siblings. Crystal is the middle child; she has an older sister who attends college. Crystal's mother's highest level of education is a high school diploma while her father's highest educational level is a bachelor's degree. Crystal's mother, who is her primary caregiver, is currently unemployed and has a yearly

household income of less than \$10,000 a year. While Crystal is not a first-generation student because one of her parents has a four-year degree, she is classified as low-income. Her low-income status makes her eligible for the Upward Bound program. Participants in the Upward Bound program can be first-generation and low-income, first-generation, low-income, or show a need for academic support.

Crystal has lived in a rural town all her life and she vividly expresses her experiences and feelings about growing up in Thomaston:

Living in a rural town, it is pretty quiet the friends you meet you pretty much grow up with them for the school year. Nothing bad really ever happens like we do not have a lot of crime. Everything is pretty close and easygoing. There are things to do but not a lot of things to do but with your friends, it is pretty fun. Some positive attributes about living in a rural town I would say it is not too busy, there is not a lot going. In a rural town, you pretty much get to know everybody since it's small and pretty much everybody knows everybody. You pretty much know your way around the town. There are not a lot of places to get lost around here and everything is just really quiet and laid back. There are negative attributes about living in a rural town like you probably do not get a lot of experiences being that we are small. I have to say there are not a lot of things to do or fun things to do. There are some but a lot of things you want to do you have to go out of town for. There are not a lot of chances for new experiences. That is why going out of town or outside of your comfort zone is really important.

Crystal is not very active in clubs and organizations at her school besides singing in the chorus and being a member of the Upward Bound program. This gives her more time to be an active participant in the Upward Bound program and take advantage of the workshops and services it provides. Crystal mentions the program offers many workshops and the workshops which are more enjoyable to her are the hands-on workshops. She enjoys workshops which teach and help you get a grasp of what you are learning. The hands-on experience allows her to not just sit down and listen to people talk but get to do the things you are learning about. Those are the workshops she enjoys the most.

While Crystal is an African American female, she notes most of her friends are White and few are Black. She also reveals her friends participate in the Upward bound program. Chrystal is a social butterfly and her social interactions at school are “pretty random.” She describes her interactions with her friends and peers:

My social interactions are pretty random; like at times when I meet new people it is because I make the first move. I will talk to them first because I am a very social person. I never had any negative approaches with anybody because I pretty much stayed to myself. When I am around people, I am not difficult to get along with, so I say I am pretty positive. My best friends would describe me as a student who is hard working, probably an overachiever, and somebody who over thinks about my work a lot. I am not a procrastinator when it comes to things. Sometimes I get things done earlier than they need to be done.

Sometimes I overachieve so I think that's what my friends will say. My peers describe me as a sweet, very social, outgoing, probably crazy, helpful, and understanding classmate.

Unfortunately, some of Crystal's friends do not really like school; however, it is not her attitude, and Crystal cheerfully describes her feelings towards school and learning:

Some of my friends, well most of them, do not really like school. However, they understand it is important if they want to possibly go to college and get themselves a good career, something they can be happy doing but also make a living off of. Most of them just want to go ahead and graduate. I love school! I have always loved school. I was never one of those kids who are like you know I don't want to be here or say what is the point of this. I love school, I like learning, and in general school makes me happy. I love reading and just learning new things. I have been told that I am a teacher's pet, so I have never had any issues with teachers and staff so that's probably another reason why I like school but yeah, I love school. Some factors which motivate me to stay in school are going to college because it is very important to me. Definitely making something of myself and not falling behind, in life. Also, because of the career I want to do which is marine biology, perhaps going to school and getting a good degree for that is something I am actually really happy about. Just the thought of being able to support myself and my family kept me going in school.

Crystal's love for school has encouraged her to enroll in dual enrollment classes. Dual enrollment is an opportunity for high school students to take college classes paid for by the state while still in high school. In order to enroll in dual enrollment classes, she

requires the assistance of her high school counselor. Crystal remarks about her interaction with her school counselor:

Usually, I rarely go to the school counselor but recently I have started going to her more and more because I was trying to get everything in order for dual enrollment next year. I think I have grown a pretty good bond with her being that I have come to her a lot recently. She is very sweet. She actually seems like one of those counselors who wants to help you with your future and actually cares about what you have going on in school. Since applying for dual enrollment, I find myself meeting with my counselor every other day trying to get everything in order. Before dual enrollment, I probably met with my counselor about once or twice a year because I really had no reason to go up there. I did not have any issues going on or any concerns I needed to address so I would only go up there when I got called in order to get my schedule right for next year.

Grades are very important to Crystal and when she feels they are slipping it is a big challenge for her.

I have experienced challenges in high school. At one point my grades weren't necessarily going down but went from A to a B, it was like an 85. To others, it is probably not that bad but to me, I started freaking out a little bit because I am used to getting straight A's. It was mostly my mom and some of my friends and teachers who kept telling me it was okay, that I am not failing or anything or even close to failing. They were like you can bring it back up, which I eventually did, so it was mainly just my mom, my friends, and the teacher who was in charge of the subject who helped me solve the challenge.

Even though Crystal's mom herself does not hold a bachelor's degree she does want Crystal to go to college. Her mom is actively finding ways to help her daughter prepare for college.

My mom does want me to go to college, but she also makes sure I know she will not be upset with me or anything if I do not go to college. This has never been an issue with me and her because I want to go to college, but she does want me to go to college. I plan to attend college after I graduate high school because I want to attend college as soon as possible. Simply because I want to get the college experience; not necessarily being on my own but kind of being on my own. As I mentioned before, I love school and that is extra school to me. I am going to study Marine Biology which is a subject I am very passionate about so that is going to be very fun to me. I am either going to Mercer University or Gordon but right now I am leaning more towards Gordon because I have been there and experienced certain things and the way they do things. My mom is helping me prepare for college, for one thing, she told me about the Upward Bound program. She told me the program will help me get ready for college and get ready for the college lifestyle. She has been making sure I track and keep up with my grades. She told me about dual enrollment because at first, I did not know anything about it. She has pretty much been encouraging me to keep my grades up and stay focused to keep me on the right path.

Crystal's mother is always trying to find ways to motivate and encourage her daughter to strive for college and one way was by introducing her daughter to the Upward Bound program.

I first came to know about the Upward Bound program when my mom saw it on Facebook. I believe she told me about it, and I had heard some friends mention something about the program, so I decided to join. I think it's been a year now since I have been a member of the Upward Bound program because I got accepted last summer. I applied to join the Upward Bound program because after what my mom and friends told me about it seemed like a really cool and really fun experience. From what my mom told me it would also get me ready for college which pretty much excited me even more. I feel like it was educational but also fun and kind of laid back. Before I enrolled in the program, I believe my sister said she was in it or maybe it was Talent Search. But my sister was in it and some of my friends were in it a little bit before I joined.

As a new Upward Bound participant Crystal can remember her first Upward Bound experience and shared the excitement she felt:

The Gordon trip I think was my first experience and it was amazing. It was great. I still remember everything that happened. That was the best memory I had. So, when we first got there, I liked the rooms and everything the way the dorm rooms were set up. You had your own space. All you have to do is share a bathroom which it's really nothing. The activities we had, we had kickball, they let us go to the gyms and stuff, and just let us hang out. The classes we had were fun, but they were not hard. In science which was my favorite we had a pretest and some other things but that was really all we had. The food there was actually really good you would think since this was school even though it is college it is school and school food usually isn't particularly good, but the food was very

good. I met some really great people; I met a lot of people, most in the same years now and graduating. I met a lot of cool people. I met some cool instructors that were there. It was a great experience and hopefully this summer program coming up will be just like the other one. I hang out socially with other Upward Bound students outside of activities organized by the program. Sometimes we go out to eat or we just go to Generation Park and walk around a little bit. Sometimes we just go into random stores and hang out like Walmart and just walk around and pick up stuff. If there is an event happening like maybe a football game or a basketball game sometimes, we hang out there.

Although Crystal is an above-average student, she experiences challenges with completing her education. She explains what she understands her educational challenges are:

Sometimes I worry about whether or not I can maintain my grades. I overthink sometimes I feel as though I may not be doing as good as I probably can, even though I do make all A's and that is as high as you can go. But sometimes, I just worry I'm not doing my absolute best even though I usually am. Sometimes I just worry about maintaining my grades. No doubt about it, the Upward Bound staff does assist me with overcoming challenges in my education. I told some of the instructors about how I worry about my grades, and they encouraged me. They were like you are doing good, you're smart, just don't over think it and don't worry about it too much, you're fine. I also heard the Upward Bound program provides tutoring, I have not tried it yet because I have not needed it yet, but they are very supportive when it comes to your grades and anything you are worried

about. While I have not participated in the tutoring the Upward Bound program offers, if I do need it, I will make sure to go.

Crystal enjoys the workshops, trips, activities, and contact with Upwards Bound during both the academic year and the summer component. She recounts some of the moments that stood out to her the most:

We had a few trips that were very fun. I had a lot of fun on the trips we went on. Most of the trips we had we learned something on the trip, but they also made it fun, so you are not bored or feel like you are sitting in a classroom. During the trips you are actually up, and on your feet, you are around your friends, and you get to eat and stuff. Most of the time they try to get your opinion on where we go so you have a say on what you do and possibly where you go, and who you get to be around. They make sure not to overwhelm us with trips, they basically space it out to make sure everybody has time for the trips. The Upward Bound summer program was very fun. We went to Gordon and pretty much got a feel for the way their campus worked. We had a Six Flags trip as well that was really very fun. It wasn't too hot and nothing drastic happened. Everybody seemed to have fun. We got on the rides, ate and everything while we were there. Everything was pretty chill, pretty fun. My most memorable trip was both the Gordon College trip and the most recent was an all-girls trip. I enjoyed that one because we pretty much got to know everybody and talked about some questions, I think everyone had but was too embarrassed to talk about. I felt like it brought everybody together more and made everybody feel like a family. There are a lot of people that kind of group themselves off, it's like everybody is in Upward Bound but they have their

own group of people who they sit with every time we go somewhere, people they room with every time we go somewhere. It is not closed off; it is sectioned but I feel like the girl's trip brought us together.

The Upward Bound program not only helps students with their academic and personal life it also helps the students financially as well.

I do believe the Upward Bound program is helping me financially. I can't remember the exact trip, but they told us something about managing your money and not spending it too much, which I needed because I spend a lot without saving sometimes. They told us to be smart with our money especially when it comes to financing a house or when it comes to college. They also told us what scholarships you can get in order to save your money and not go into debt and have loans, so they help me financially.

Crystal found there are more female students in the Upward Bound program she attends. She expresses her feelings on attending a majority female program:

I am pretty ok with being in a majority female program. Because you are able to relate more with the females because y'all will pretty much have things going down you can relate to, discuss, and talk about rather than the boys. It is fun when it is a mixture of both because sometimes you can get a different opinion, sometimes the same gender seems to think the same way. Both ways are equally fun.

The Upward Bound program provides exposure to students with different cultural events and different locations. Crystal would like the opportunity to explore different things during her tenure in the program:

If I had the opportunity to add or change anything in the program it would be going to different locations. This year due to COVID since I have been in the program, we have not been able to go to many places but I would say go more places, more out of Georgia places. So far, we have been mainly in Atlanta and Savannah. We have not been to other places except this upcoming trip we are going to Tennessee. Either way, everything else is fine.

Crystal has a great relationship with the Upward Bound staff. She finds the staff are easy to talk with:

I get along great with the staff, mostly all of them, actually all of them are easy to talk to about things. They don't judge you if you ever need to talk about something, they are there to listen and give their honest opinions about things. They won't hurt your feelings if you need an honest opinion. They will give it to you but they will be sure to not hurt your feelings they make sure you feel like you are being heard. They are very fun; they are not like teachers who are sometimes kind of strict or uptight. The instructors of Upward Bound and Talent Search are pretty much laid back, but they also of course want you to show them respect because they show you respect. They're great!

The Upward Bound staff encourage all students to complete high school and enroll into college and they expose the students to skills which will help with those endeavors:

I believe the Upward Bound program staff help motivate me to stay in high school because they really care about your future. They don't pressure you to go to college because college is not for everyone, but they do want you to stay in high school and get your education. They want the best for everybody, and they want

to make sure you are not wasting your future or leading yourself down a bad path. Some skills I learned from the program is to be more open with how I am feeling. Usually, if I am upset or sad about something and somebody asks me if I am ok, I say I'm fine even if I am not. So being in Upward Bound has made me express how I am feeling more. So, if I am not ok, I will say I am not ok, and why I am not ok! I find I am more comfortable with myself, and my confidence is not fully, but Upward Bound has definitely helped with it so I am not necessarily outgoing but vocal and social with more people than my usual small group.

Crystal was asked her thoughts about going to college before joining the Upward Bound program and how the program is preparing her for college:

Before joining the Upward Bound, I was still excited about going to college, but I was nervous because I was not sure how the rooming situation was or how stressful it would be. But with Upward Bound I feel like they can more so calm you down about the whole thing and give you a lot more experience on how it could possibly be. We do a lot of college tours and again with the Gordon stay we actually were able to stay on campus and got to kind of live the college life experience not to the max but get a better feeling on how it would be. I feel like that kind of calmed me down a little bit about going to college and made me feel not so nervous to go but excited. I feel the Upward Bound program is helping me prepare for college because we do tours and they let us actually go into the colleges. One of the tours we took they let us see how the dorms were set up so we would know if we wanted to go to college there or if we would have to share

with roommates if we choose that certain college. Sometimes they show us how the classes would work and what classes they offer so if you were to apply to that college and they did not have your major you wouldn't get upset or anything. They pretty much get you ready for college without giving you too much of that experience so you can experience it for yourself. My mom is very excited about me participating in the Upward Bound program. Before participating in Upward Bound, I would be home a lot because I would just go to school and come home, maybe in August I would go to the football games but when football season was over, I would be at home. My mother really likes me being in the program. Once I got into Upward Bound, I was out more, and she was excited about me being out. I got to go places and experience new things and not be stuck at home; she was really excited about that.

Crystal provided comments on her overall Upward Bound experience. She has a genuine appreciation for the program services and staff:

I would just say Upward Bound is a great place to meet new people. If you have a small circle of friends and you pretty much just stick to those people, you don't go out of your comfort zone with many things. I feel like Upward Bound is a great way to express yourself and just get a feel for new people and new experiences. With me when I first got in Upward Bound, I would just stay with the people I knew the people I was comfortable with but being in Upward Bound it is like you get a feel of everything and everybody, so I made new friends started opening up to other people just began to get bigger with people I trust and love being around.

Jane: All Around Top Scholar

Jane is a 10th grade student at Upson-Lee high school with a very impressive 3.9 GPA. She is a young African American female born and raised in rural Thomaston, Georgia. Jane is the youngest of four children. All her siblings graduated from high school and a few of them have attained a four-year college degree. Jane's goal is to enroll at The University of Georgia immediately after her high school graduation. As an inspiring future pediatrician, Jane knows it will take about nine years of schooling after high school to reach her career goals, so she wants to get it started as soon as possible.

Jane lives with both her mother and father. She is the only child left in the home. Jane classifies as both a first-generation and low-income student. While both of her parents hold a 2-year associate's degree, neither has a 4-year bachelor's degree. Jane's mom is currently unemployed, and her father works in transportation. Jane is not sure of her family's current annual income.

While Jane has lived in a rural town all her life, she expressed her goal is to one day move away from that environment:

Some experience of living in a rural town for me is that it is small and closer-knit. I feel when you're in a rural town you're closer together, but I don't feel like I want to stay here all my life. I want to move to a bigger city. While rural towns are closer knit, they do have their downsides. I feel sometimes the people in small towns are also judgmental. Some positive attributes about a rural town once again are it is closer-knit, and there are more opportunities for you to be known in the town. I guess you can say overall you are better off in your career opportunities. A downside to me about living in a small town is limited

exposure. I feel when I go to bigger cities, I find out I am not exposed as much. Some of the things I learned here I feel I would learn more if I was in a bigger town.

Jane is an all-around high school student who keeps busy and active in a number of clubs, organizations, and activities. While she participates in a plethora of activities her education and grades are number one:

I do dance-team, basketball, and cheerleading. I also participate in Armstrong School of Dance. I am a member of the Beta Club, Chick-fil-A Leadership as well as serve on the student council.

Jane was asked the race of most of her friends and if they participated in the Upward Bound program. She responded by saying “Most of my friends are African American. Some of them are participants in the program however, I feel like they are not as active in the program as they could be.”

Jane stated her best friends would describe her as an overachiever; she continued by illustrating how her peers feel about her, how her friends feel about school, and how she personally feels about school:

My best friends would describe me as an overachiever, hardworking, and very indecisive. Sometimes I just can't decide. Sometimes I'm very motivated to get my work in and sometimes I don't. Like I try to keep on getting motivated like keep on pushing myself to do it but sometimes I am not always as hardworking as I could be. I have days where I slack off and times, years, and semesters when I am more motivated to do work. My peers would describe me as helpful, patient, and a funny classmate. I have several groups of friends and I feel like when it

comes to my schoolwork area and my classes I am not surrounded by people, I consider my friends that I would hang with more like associates or people I talk to because they are in my class, I would not really consider them my friends. I would say most of my friends are in other classes, and I don't get to see them as much. My close friends see school as coming to hang with your friends; they are not as motivated with schoolwork. I like school but of course, there are days when I'm not as enthusiastic about going but for the most part I like it. I feel like I am a pretty social person, so I really want to talk to everyone in school. Whoever I am in class with I try to talk with them. I always try to speak to everyone I pass by, so I try to be social with everyone. It is not like a specific group, it's like if I am at school and I pass by someone I will say hey how are you. What I like about school is hanging out, getting to be with my friends and peers, learning, and the extracurricular activities I get to do. Some factors which help motivate me to stay in high school are wanting to get the best possible outcome in my after-school life. Also, I want to have nice things in life, so it really motivates me to stay in school to get the best education possible.

Jane stated she has a pretty good relationship with her high school counselor in and outside of school:

I have a pretty good relationship with my school counselor. I try to see her as much as possible, to make sure I stay on track with everything I need to. I try to meet with my school counselor every month but one of my counselors she's a family friend so it's kind of different. When I see her outside of school, I talk to her as well.

Jane was asked to share her experiences of any challenges she may have had in high school and who assisted her in solving them:

The challenge I had was when I first transitioned to high school, I had trouble getting used to the feel of it. Older peers in school helped me figure it out, they kind of just talked to me and let me know it's just something you have to get used to and they gave me advice on how to try to figure it out.

Like many parents of Upward Bound Students, both of Jane's parents want her to go to college. Jane describes how they are preparing her for college:

My parents want me to go to college, they both try to make sure I join as many programs as I can that talk about college. They also try to make sure I'm on top of my schoolwork so I can get exposed to much information. My parents are definitely supportive of me participating in the Upward Bound program. They think it really helps me as well with exposure to career opportunities and college opportunities. Also, they believe the program helps me build my leadership skills.

Jane was an active participant in the Talent Search program at the middle school and was actively recruited to join the Upward Bound program:

I first came to know about the Upward Bound program because my Talent Search director made sure I was exposed to it and let me know about the program. I have been in the Upward Bound program for two years. I applied to join the Upward Bound program because I knew it would further expose me to more career as well as college opportunities. I had both friends and family in the program before I enrolled in the program. I hang out socially with other Upward Bound

participants outside of program activities. Just recently over the weekend, we all had a pool party. We get together and sometimes we study together. A few of us have gone out to eat multiple times. My first memory of participating in the Upward Bound program I feel like it would be going online virtually because it was during COVID. So, I remember logging onto the workshops a lot.

Jane responded “no” to being asked if she experiences any challenges completing her education. However, she had a detailed response when asked if the Upward Bound program provides assistance with any challenges in completing her education:

So, the Upward Bound staff have always encouraged us if we had any educational needs, while I hadn't necessarily had to take advantage of those resources because it's always been a little easier for me when it came to education, but they're definitely out there for you to take advantage of.

Although she is only a high school sophomore Jane is excited to begin her college career as soon as possible so she can get into the career of her choice:

Because the career field I'm trying to go into takes up to nine years I want to get a jump start as soon as I can so I can finish as soon as I can. I plan on attending the University of Georgia and I want to study biology. The career I am interested in pursuing is a pediatrician.

The Upward Bound program helps students in many ways and Jane shares her experiences, skills learned, and activities she has participated in so far with the program:

Throughout the year we not only learn but we have workshops, virtual and in person. My favorite workshops are the ones where we talk about saving our money. We have career trips throughout the year that teach us about multiple

things like careers, places, and colleges, and we go to museums. We learn many other things like everyday things like bullying, protecting yourself, banking, and how to do your taxes. The Upward Bound program helps me financially because they provide stipends and also, each director is super nice and if you talk to them, they are willing to help you in multiple ways.

The Upward Bound program provides tutoring however, I have never attended yet. I tried to attend but throughout the year I participate in so many sports and clubs I have to sacrifice and miss it. During the Upward Bound summer, we went to Gordon, and we also did SAT/ACT prep at the high school. During our Gordon time, we learned different subjects as well which help prepare us for the upcoming school year. During the summer we also went on trips, and we not only did academic things we did team bonding activities with each other. We played games and learned more about our director and our peers as well. My most memorable trip was when we went to Savannah. In Savannah we learned the most history related to me, and I was most interested in that. The Upward Bound program has taught me teamwork, communication, comprehension, listening, leadership, and creativity skills.

Jane expressed there are more female students in her Upward Bound program and explained being in a program with a majority of females' kind of helps her be more comfortable because they are all like her friends and she can relate more to the females. Jane attested all the Upward Bound staff are super nice and she feels like she can talk to any one of them.

Jane was asked if given the opportunity to add or change something about the Upward Bound program what it would be. She stated she would probably do more interactive workshops like cooking and creative arts. More panting, dancing, and singing workshops.

Jane was adamant about the ways Upward Bound helped motivate her to stay in high school. She expressed the staff stresses to the fullest the importance of resources, so you can use them to further your education. Not only for academic and career purposes but for yourself as well.

Jane has always wanted to go to college, but she found Upward Bound helped her motivate herself to understand the importance of going to college:

Upward Bound is helping prepare me for college. They talk about going to college in workshops, they take us on college tours, and when they are in the school, they hand out brochures to help explain different colleges and what you need to do to prepare and stay on the right track.

In conclusion, Jane had the opportunity to share additional experiences she wanted about being in an Upward Bound Program:

I think the program has really helped me come out as a person. I feel like before the Upward Bound program, I was more sheltered and shy but now I am willing to speak up in class and in everyday life. I am more willing to be open to different ideas because they showed us a lot of different opportunities that helped me change my perception of how I perceived things before I was in the program. The directors are really great at helping us with situations at home in

school and with friends as well. I feel like I can talk to them about my everyday experiences.

Kayla: “I’m Not Ready to Leave Upward Bound Yet”

Kayla is a 17-year-old African American female student in the 12th grade. She graduated this past spring 2022 semester with her high school diploma. She will enroll at Albany State University in the fall immediately following her high school graduation and study nursing.

Kayla was born in Garden City, Michigan; however, she moved to small, quiet, and rural Thomaston, Georgia, when she was three years old. She voiced her experiences living in a rural town:

Thomaston is very quiet, nothing to do, and a chill place, you know everyone, everyone is friendly, it is easy to get around and you know where everything is. The negative attribute about Thomaston is there are not many activities for teens to do and it gets boring.

Kayla was raised in a single household, with her mother being her primary caregiver. Kayla has 12 siblings; however, only one other sibling lives in the home with her and her mother. Kayla classifies as a first-generation student because neither of her parents earned a four-year college degree. The highest level of education her mother completed was a high school diploma. Kayla is not aware of the highest educational attainment of her father. Kayla is a well-rounded and active student; she participates in National Beta Club, National Honor Society, chorus, and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) which is a national career and technical student organization offered to high school students. Participation in FCCLA offers members the

opportunity to increase their leadership potential and develop skills for life planning, goal setting, problem solving, decision making, and interpersonal communication necessary in the home and workplace. Kayla seeks opportunities that will help prepare her for her academic and career goals.

Most of Kayla's friends are African American and participate in the Upward Bound program. Kayla indicated her best friend would describe her as quiet at first, nevertheless, once she gets used to her environment, she is talkative and outgoing. Her peers describe her as a caring, nice and helpful classmate. Kayla recalls a time in class everyone was trying to log into a school assignment and was unsuccessful, so she went around assisting her peers in logging into the program. Kayla was asked how her friends feel about school and she believes most of them will miss high school but are not ready for college yet; however, they are ready for the experience of go to college to get the experience. She feels sometimes the work is hard for her friends and they have their days when they do not want to go to school. Kayla feels if they are not having a bad day everyone at school is nice and are kind people. She finds there are many happy moments at school. She revealed this year was really good because there was no negative things happening and everyone has been nice and happy. Kaya likes going to school. It helps her understand stuff more and learn new things. Kayla is motivated by her mother, teachers, and Upward Bound staff to stay in school.

Kayla outlined her experiences and interactions with her high school counselor as well as how often she meets her throughout the school year. Kayla has experienced challenges in high school such as precalculus which is her hardest class. Her mom, counselor, and classmates assisted her in working through the challenging class.

My high school counselor always helps me because I always ask questions about life, and she always gives me the answers and stuff I need, and she also wants me to take challenging and honor classes. I took a precalculus honors class, and it was so hard, and I told her I wanted to drop out of it, but she told me I had it and I should keep going, I ended up passing the class. I usually meet with my counselor once a month or every other month.

Kayla's mom wants her to go to college and is helping her prepare by asking Kayla daily if she has applied for scholarships, completed housing forms, believes she is ready, and completed financial aid applications. Her mom tries to make sure Kayla has everything done to be prepared for college.

Kayla has been in the Upward Bound program for four years. She first came to know about the Upward Bound program when she was in middle school because she was already a participant in the Educational Talent Search program. Her Talent Search counselor informed her about the Upward Bound program; she applied and was accepted. Kayla applied for the Upward Bound program because it seems fun and would help throughout high school and help her get into college. She believed it would be a good experience. Kayla already had friends in the Upward Bound program and made new ones as well in the program. She hangs out with her Upward Bound friends outside of program activities; they go to fairs and go out to eat. Kayla cheerfully recalled her first memory of participating in the Upward Bound program:

I was just thinking about my interview because I was so shy, and I was just smiling, and my mom was talking to me the whole time and Ms. King kept telling me you can talk, you can tell me about yourself.

Kayla does not believe she has experienced any challenges with completing her education, although when asked if she experienced challenges completing your education does the Upward Bound program provide you with assistance,” she responded the Upward Bound program did assist her in applying for financial aid which she did not know anything about. Also, she thought she would have to reapply once she started college, but the Upward Bound staff informed her financial aid must be completed yearly for continued funding. Kayla stated the Upward Bound program helps her financially when they receive their stipends. She says she puts her stipend money in her savings account to help pay for her tuition and other college related expenses which helps a lot.

The Upward Bound program provides students activities and services during the academic year as well as the summer component. Kayla enjoyed the TikTok Tuesday workshop facilitated by the Upward Bound staff; students created a TikTok account and had the opportunity to create a video encouraging others to join the program. She also enjoyed the workshop which helped with organization and time management. Kayla admitted she is only organized sometimes but not all the time, so she learned different ways to stay organized. In the past years, Kayla participated in the afterschool tutoring provided by the Upward Bound program Although tutoring was offered during the current year, Kayla did not have the opportunity to participate due to work and homework. COVID-19 affected us all; however, the Upward Bound Program still provided virtual and in-person services to students while adhering to the guidelines set up by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as the Thomaston school district. Kayla reminisced on a cultural workshop hosted during the

pandemic. She remembers watching the Black Panther movie on a big screen outside. She stated it was cold and she was amused the screen kept falling.

Kayla enjoyed the Upward Bound summer program and the SAT prep classes offered really helped her a lot because the more she took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) classes the higher her score got. When she actually took the SAT, she had a good score. Attending the classes at Gordon State College and living in the dorms gave her a small college experience. She found it to be really nice and fun. Kayla also enjoyed the end of the year cultural trips. Her most memorable cultural trip was the trip to New York. She felt there was “good vibes.” It was most memorable because she was in New York during her birthday.

Kayla noted many students in her Upward Bound Program are female. She does not particularly feel any type of way about it, but she does think it would be good if there was more males in the program because it is a great program and they should get to experience it, too. Kayla was passionate about describing her relationship between herself and the Upward Bound staff:

The Upward Bound staff are like my second parents. They are always there to answer my questions. I believe if I need help with anything I can reach out to the staff. They always ask how I am doing and how my day is going. They always check to see how I am doing in my classes as well as overall.

The goal of the Upward Bound program is to help students with high school completion and college enrollment. Kayla has always wanted to go to college and study nursing. She voiced she would have the same feelings if she was not enrolled in the

program. However, Kayla describes how the Upward Bound staff motivated her and other students to stay in high school:

They are always asking how your grades are looking, are you doing ok in school. Whenever somebody would say I don't want to do school anymore they will always try to motivate them and find a different way to keep them interested in school.

Kayla has gained many skills as a participant of the program which will help in her future.

I'm more patient, I believe, because I wasn't really patient but I'm just more patient now. My communication skills are better. I didn't really talk as much but now I talk a lot and to everybody. I used to be really shy but now I'm an outgoing person and I try not to be shy anymore.

Kayla says the Upward Bound program is preparing her for college. Given the opportunity, the one thing she expresses the desire to change about the program are the entry requirements. She would eliminate the parental income and educational attainment requirements. Kayla values the program so much she thinks these requirements should be removed so more students who want to do better for themselves may qualify and benefit from program services.

During the summer program, she has been afforded the opportunity to take classes taught by college professors while she is still a high school student. She was excited; those experiences really prepared her for college. During the counseling sessions she was advised on life as a college student and was taught what she would have to do so she can get used to college life. Kayla's mom is very grateful she has had the opportunity to be

in an Upward Bound program. Her mom loves the services, opportunities, and the exposure the program has provided for Kayla. She feels the program helped Kayla a lot. Her mom wished she would be able to continue in the college level TRIO programs, but unfortunately, Albany State University does not offer these services.

When asked to share any additional experiences about participating in the Upward Bound program, Kayla expressed her heartfelt gratitude for Upward Bound and having the privilege to be in such a rewarding program for four years. Kayla shared her mother's sentiment wishing she was going to a college that offered TRIO programs. Kayla conveyed she was not ready to leave the Upward Bound program. She reminisced about the last trip she participated in with the program. The last, and senior, trip she took while in Upward Bound was to Los Angeles for four days with other students and staff. Kayla stated she has never been to places like New York or Los Angeles, so this was a big experience for her. The Upward Bound program allowed her to experience things she did not expect like meeting new people and making new friends due to her reserved and quiet nature. Because of the program Kayla believes she is more talkative and social. Kayla enjoyed the big trip out of state as well as the local activities. She enjoyed traveling to Atlanta from Thomaston to participate in team building activities such as Escape Rooms. She credits the study skills and time management workshops for helping maintain her grades. She wishes she did not have to miss workshops and mentioned she wants to participate in a yoga workshop the program facilitated this year. Kayla plans on volunteering for the Upward Bound program this summer because "I am not ready to leave Upward Bound yet."

Kelis: “We are Not Students and Staff; We are Family”

Kelis is a bright young African American female student in the 10th grade at Upson-Lee High School. She has an above average GPA of 3.5. Kelis was born in Texas, and moved to Thomaston, GA with her parents when she was two years old. Kelis lives with both her mother and father. Kelis is the oldest of three children. Both Kelis’s mom and dad graduated high school and went to college, however, neither parent obtained a bachelor’s degree. This classifies Kelis as a first-generation student. Her mother works in sales and her father is a retired veteran and business owner. Kelis reported her family yearly income is between \$10,000-\$19,000 a year thus classifying her as an income eligible student.

Kelis was raised in rural Thomaston and she provides some insight into living in a small town:

Living in a small town has its perks and some bad things. Everybody knows everybody so that's good; when it's bad everybody knows everything it's about 50/50. Some positive attributes about living in a rural town would be the stores, the churches, all that, the community. There are negative attributes about living in a rural town like I said before everybody finds out whether it's good or bad. Teen violence is also one of them, fighting, teens getting hold of stuff they don't need to get a hold of.

Kelis is involved in a few clubs and organizations while she is in high school. She is a proud Upward Bound scholar, she participates in chorus, and she is in Youth Leadership. Youth Leadership is an organization for Thomaston teens to help out

in the community throughout the year. Kelis talked about her classification of friends and their status in the Upward Bound program:

I don't really have a designated race that I am friends with, I mean I have my White friends, I have my Black friends, it's like a mixture. Most of my African American friends are in the UB program or UBMS (Upward Bound Math and Science). I feel like my best friend would probably say I am the class clown, I may goof around in class a lot, but I always do my work. That is how I would be classified as a student by my best friend. My peers would describe me as the class clown, somebody who wants to know everything, somebody who always asks a lot of questions, and somebody who is automatically the teacher's pet without even trying. I feel like my friends are very involved in school, especially their grades. I feel like I associate myself with individuals who want to upgrade themselves, so I feel like they really are involved in school. I love school believe it or not, I always say I am always ready to get out of there towards the end of the year. But I love school. I like seeing my friends, my teachers, and I love the school period. To motivate me in staying in high school, I try to think about where I am going to be in twenty years when I don't feel like doing no work or I don't feel like studying. I try to think about how successful I am going to be, and I just don't want to be a failure. This year I was not as really involved in school, I was but I wasn't. Sports-wise I was but other than that I was just a regular student.

Kelis has regular and positive interactions with her high school counselor:

I feel like with high school you have an assigned counselor for the whole year. My counselor calls me in when I need a pep talk, she makes sure my grades stay high. If I even get a C, she knows that isn't me, so she calls me in there and makes me get my head on straight. She doesn't sugar coat anything; she gives it to me straight; she is a great guidance counselor.

Kelis explained she has faced challenges in high school and how she was able to overcome them:

I would say yes, I have experienced challenges in high school especially with Spanish. I recently took Spanish, and I feel like my Spanish teacher (she's Colombian) just broke it down. I can't really explain it but she made Spanish seem so much easier for me I managed to get a 97 throughout the entire year.

Kelis's parents without a doubt want her to go to college. She recalls how they are preparing her for college in the near future:

Absolutely, my parents want me to go to college. They help me look into more colleges. I really don't usually need help with homework but if I do I know I can go to them. Most of all they are there for me when I need them.

Kelis was a very active Educational Talent Search participant and that is how she first came to know about the Upward Bound program. However, she highlighted some additional details she learned about the Upward Bound program before joining:

I originally got introduced when I was in like six-grade, but I was in TRIO. Then I heard high school students talking about it, saying they got checks. I was like oh my God I want to do that I want to do that when I get into high school. I have

been in the Upward Bound program for two years now. I applied to join the program because I had sat into one of those things at the end of the year when they told you about Upward Bound. I just felt so welcome without even being in the program to where I just wanted to join if people get checks or not. I had friends before I enrolled in the program, I don't think I had any family enrolled. I hang out socially with Upward Bound students outside of program services, sometimes we go out to eat, we go to the movies, swimming pool parties the whole 9. It has been so long since I was in the program so I think my first memory may have been us going around introducing ourselves. When I think of Upward Bound, I think of a family having somebody that I can always call.

Kelis experiences challenges in completing her education she struggles in some of her academic subjects:

Math can be a challenge in completing my education however, I make sure I always finish my assignments. The Upward Bound program helps with these challenges to my education. They provide after schoolwork like they'll do zooms whatever to help with your homework. They'll have speakers come in and help you. They also do stuff during the summertime.

After high school graduation Kelis feels she wants to enroll in college and not take any time off:

Personally, I don't want to take off too many months after I get to high school because I feel like my head is not going to be in the game. I feel like when I get out of high school, I need to jump into college to keep my training. My heart is set on Albany State University right now, I think if I'm not mistaken when I

visited there, they had a nursing program so that's what I would major in.

Kelis has had many memorable experiences in the program in the past two years; she reminisces about some of the program activities, services, and memories:

During the school year we take trips mostly to go see colleges since we are becoming soon-to-be graduates. We do workshops, a bunch of workshops, we do zoom calls, we sometimes go help out with the 8th graders and we do a good little bit of stuff. In the zoom calls sometimes we make projects, sometimes we get help with work, and sometimes we have inspirational Zoom calls. The Upward Bound program does provide workshops. I love the interacting workshops if that makes sense. I love that we can express ourselves! The Upward Bound program provides tutoring. I think I attended one or two sessions. I would have attended more but during the time they were doing it I was in sports and most of the time I was at practice. I love the Upward Bound Summer program. I absolutely love it! During the summer we went to Gordon, and we felt like we were college students. We got up at a certain time, we had to sleep at a certain time, we did work but we also had a lot of fun. Some of the things we did for fun we went to the gym, we had kickball games, we played basketball, we had dinners of course, I think we had a little pajama party. It was a whole group of good stuff. I think we did three biology classes, of course a reading class and I think it was a social studies class. My most memorable trip or activity with the Upward Bound program I would say was my birthday. I got to spend my birthday with them one time at Six Flags. I'm not going to lie, I didn't get to go on too many rides, but

they still made my day special. The Upward Bound program also helps me financially with the stipends we receive.

Kelis believes there was more female students in her Upward Bound program when she first joined and expresses her feelings on this matter:

At the beginning I think it was more females in the program but now it is starting to balance out. I felt pretty normal, pretty regularly by having more females in the program at the beginning. I mean I felt like they could understand me more than boys did, so I felt pretty comfortable.

When asked what her relationship was like between her and the Upward Bound staff Kelis had an emotional response:

I call them my family and I love them so dearly. For real if given the opportunity to add or change something about the Upward Bound program I really don't think I would change anything. Yes, yes, yes, I do believe the Upward Bound program helped motivate me to stay in high school. I feel like they kind of try to bring out the fun things and not make high school so boring and lame. I feel like they push you to limits you know you can be pushed, and I feel like they just overall make it better. Some skills I learned as a participant of the program is to never say I can't do it! Really just never give up to always want to be successful and to know you got this. I learned motivation skills, interview skills, and how to talk to people.

Before joining the Upward Bound program Kelis always wanted to go to college but thought it was too hard. She is better prepared now as a result of being in the program:

I really thought college was hard, I guess. I always wanted to go but I just thought college was so hard and I was going to be so stressed. But it is really like the upper level of high school. I feel like Upward Bound is definitely helping prepare me for college. I feel like it is preparing me, so I just won't be so blindsided when it's time for me to go to college. I feel like it's helping me with my people skills, my studying skills, my academic skills, really just make me a better student. My parents like me participating in the Upward Bound program. They like that I am not just sitting in the house all the time. The program has me open with everything. You know most students in high school are either going to school or doing sports, but with Upward Bound we are open to so many new things where we do a whole lot of learning.

Kelis has had so many good memories thus far in the program, she shares some of those memories in detail:

There are so many good memories I don't know just one to just focus on. I will say all the trips and traveling we do together I feel like every trip is something new or something special. I feel like probably the recent one we took when we actually had to board a plane with them, and I just felt like overall the trip was just so fun and great I felt like we learned so many things. I feel like we were family on the trip. We were not students and staff members, we were family! I probably want to just highlight the staff. I feel like most people try to degrade students but TRIO or Upward Bound, they never degrade us. They always help us! They always help us grow and become better students and people.

Red: “With the Parents I have, I have No Choice but to Like School”

Red is a 16-year-old African American young lady in the 10th grade attending Upson-Lee High school. She is a student with a 3.9 GPA. Red was born in North Carolina and her family moved to Thomaston when she was five years old. Red is the youngest of six children and her mother is their primary caregiver. Red’s mother is a high school graduate and never attended college, whereas her father holds a bachelor’s degree. Red has five siblings, two of her siblings went to college right after graduation and recently graduated with their bachelor’s degree. Red is classified as a low-income student because her mother works in a hospital with mental health patients and brings home an annual income of less than \$10,000 a year.

Red and her family moved from one rural area to another, so living in that environment is what she is used to. She gives examples of why she enjoys living in a rural area:

It is quiet, well you can tell the difference between when it's quiet and loud so it's not always up and steady. You can hear the police from a mile away but it's mostly quiet. You know the majority of everyone, it is really small. I like it, I like being in a rural town. I don't like the city too much. I don't like being within the city or living in the city. I kind of live a little bit more countryside than in Thomaston but it's all kind of the same thing and it's all together. I'm not from Thomaston but coming from a rural town as well it's all the same. I'm from North Carolina so it's all the same, it's steadier and it's not as fast paced as it would be in any other town or place. The schools are together and connected and are very family oriented. Some positive things about living in a rural town are that

everyone is close. Like I said you know more of a lot of people, I guess you could say everything is in one setting. Not only is everyone close but everything is close. I don't really think there is anything negative about living in a rural town. I like it. I like living in a rural town. The city is not for me. I like visiting the city, but it is not for me. I like the peace and quiet.

While maintaining a 3.9 GPA Red finds time to be extremely active in clubs, organizations, and activities in her school and community:

I am involved in Youth Leadership, I just finished youth leadership. Youth Leadership is an abbreviation for Youth Leadership of Upson. At the beginning of the school year a few selected people between sophomores to seniors are chosen, usually it was like 10 people but this year she doubled it to 20 because of the COVID years. The lady, her name is Lauren, is a part of the Thomaston Chambers of Commerce, so she does a lot of things in Thomaston. She is a top deal in Thomaston. She is over it and she have a couple other people that are over it. Basically, it was a school-year oriented thing; the school was involved with it as well. Our school year started in September if I am not mistaken, and it ended in March. Every month we will go somewhere during the school year. They pick one place to go to the community for us to tour and give research and background information on those places. I know one of my favorites was the jail, when we went to tour the jail, we got a chance to experience reasons why we don't want to be there! We met the chief. We met everybody there. She also worked with people within the jail system, so she gets information from everywhere. We recently just graduated. She gave us a medal and things like that. I also

participate in basketball, chorus, I'm a part of Beta Club, I'm also a part of the Chick-fil-A Youth Leadership Academy. I'm also a worker at Chick-fil-A so that goes hand and hand. I am a part of Upward Bound of course and so far, that's it. Oh, I am also a part of the Student Council. I try my best to participate in whatever is open to me. Those are also so far what I am in, and I am most active. Youth Leadership has definitely helped me. I did a description on that one because I didn't know what it was until I became a sophomore, but it has done a lot for me kind of like Upward Bound, it did a lot.

Red was asked the race of her friends, if they participate in the Upward Bound program, as well as their thoughts about Red as a student and classmate. Red also provided insight to how she feels about school and what motivates her to stay in high school:

Most of my friends are predominantly Black, African American. Mostly 100 percent of them participate in Upward Bound. They were referred to it in middle school if not they recently just joined. We all try to refer to each other and get the same credit hours and stuff. My best friend would describe me as a very smart student, because I stay on top of my grades, I am outspoken, when I don't understand something, I'm going to ask the teacher, I'm going to stop in the middle of her lesson to make sure I understand it or somebody around me understands it. I am outgoing within everything, I come to school not only to just do good and things like that I try to participate in many things. I love to encourage my friends to do things with me and I like to have a good time while I'm in school. I don't want to be anywhere just bored. I try to have fun not class

clown fun, but I try to bring excitement not only to myself but others around me while I'm in school to make it fun for others. My peers would describe me as fun to be around on a good day. Outgoing within schoolwork and fun to be around, hopefully I hope that's how they describe me. The majority of my friends like school. I don't think they like it because of schoolwork. I think they like it because that is where everybody is at the majority of the day, that's when they go to see their friends. But on the actual education part of school, a lot of us like it, being in class with each other and having class with your friend is more welcoming than having a class with somebody you barely know and have to create a bond with. Our classmates are starting to get pretty close. Being that today is technically our first day of summer; before this call we had a little class get together where some of us went to Waffle House and Generation Park things like that. We definitely got pretty close. We do pretty good in school. We make sure we work with each other to not necessarily cheat but if those answers get around it just get around. We don't cheat but we make sure everybody has the information. It is more of a study guide. Some of us are in the same class and some of us might be taking honors and the rest of us maybe just on the grade level work we're supposed to be doing at the moment, so we make sure we all have it and everybody is going to pass. I have my days when it comes to their social one minute my social battery is it's all level you would think I had ADHD. I speak to everyone in the hallways. Other days I don't want to be bothered. I think it just depends on how I wake up in the morning if I'm able to find my school clothes and I don't have to wait an extra hour because I don't know what to wear. It just

all depends. The majority of the time I don't try to be a blooper every day. It's just that everybody has their moments when it comes to being around people sometimes, I want to be around people sometimes I don't but the majority of the time I love being around my friends. They keep me up if they keep me going and hopefully, I do the same for them. I love school, I know when I was younger school was the best but when I got to high school the aspect of school being the best definitely changed. I think it just changed because of the scheduling. I do not like to get up early in the morning and recently it hasn't been so bad because I've started driving to school. I was able to redo my little schedule to what time I get up. I like school, there are some days I am ready to get out and graduate, and then some days I'm like I can wait until graduation because I am not ready to leave. It all depends on the day, that's all, and the teacher but other than that I like school it gives me something to look forward to. With the parents I have I have no choice but to like it.

Following in one's family's educational footsteps can be a great motivator to stay in school. Red is one who was inspired by her sisters' accomplishments:

Definitely, my family motivates me to stay in school and I know it's kind of like an average mediocre answer but it's definitely my family. Recently my sister just graduated from North Carolina A&T and she's going into the military as a MP. Not only that she got a car straight out of college so the more she's moving up the influence is amazing. Not only that but my mother not being able to go to college or just didn't go to college definitely influenced me to go beyond that. To go beyond a high school diploma, my father actually graduated college, he has a

couple of degrees as well. But making my parents proud and making myself proud. I don't want to be the student walking around with C's and B's. I strive to go the farthest I can go. Not being able to meet certain goals in school, grades and attendance as well definitely sets me back but it just gives me something more to look forward to and more goals to meet.

School counselors assist students with class schedules and help make sure they are on track for graduation. Red realized the importance of having a relationship with her school counselor:

OK so we have three school counselors, Mr. Childs. I can't name other ones because I don't have them. My counselor is Mr. Childs; he's pretty cool. My mother has definitely encouraged me to stay close with him because he is my counselor, he knows the most about me. I just didn't know the value; my mom used to always tell me to do daily check-ins with my counselor or weekly check-ins. I just never felt like it was necessary. But as I got older and as I got to the end of my sophomore year, I wanted to do dual enrollment and you know having a schedule and creating a schedule for that and they're creating schedule for my upcoming school year seeing my counselor was definitely what I need to do cause the level of confusion I had was an all-time high. So, I created a bond with my counselor so now when he sees me at the door, he is like what do you want! He doesn't even greet me, he's a pretty cool counselor. Sometimes he kind of gets me on edge because he acts like he doesn't know what he's doing but other than that, Mr. Childs is great. I have a pretty good bond with him, with it being that I have two more years left with him. I'm sure our bond will continue to grow, and

he will know when I'm coming to see him. I think the other two counselors are actually leaving, I think he's the only one left, so I've created a pretty good bond with him. My peers love him. I have a friend who ran for homecoming court and her father wasn't able to show up and walk with her down the court, she had issues with her father but nevertheless Mr. Childs was definitely there, and he walked her across the court. He had his nice suit on, and he always dressed up so he really didn't have to worry about the colors, and he walked her across the court. I know ever since then she couldn't stop talking about how she just loved Mr. Childs so that was amazing; yeah, he's a pretty good counselor. For the past couple of months since I haven't been trying to get my upcoming school year schedule down packed, so I don't have to worry and stress about what classes I'm taking when I get in high school next year, I have been meeting with him pretty often. At least twice a week but before that at the beginning of the year I wasn't going to go to that counselor's office, my mom used to have to push me to go to that counselor's office but now I see why it is important. Sometimes I used to go there just to get out of class, but I definitely love going to the counselor's office. He tells me what I need to do about upcoming things, he tells me what I don't need to do, he tells me what's important, and what's not important.

The transition from middle school to high school can often be a challenge for some students, Red explains some of her challenges in high school and who assisted her in solving them:

I can say that I had challenges with my schoolwork. It was a big change from middle school to high school. I have always been on top of my grades but when

you see people at honors day, and you are not there it hurts your feelings. I really haven't really been able to go through that yet because I made it to both honors day but it's just you want to make sure you're getting invited, to Beta Club, you want to make sure you're in Honors Society so in order to make sure you're there you have to make the grades. What's been keeping me from making the grades is my own sanity and my mother driving me crazy about my grade, so she's definitely helped me. She helped me to keep them up, but she didn't help me with the work. But as far as the work I have never been one to not ask questions. If I don't understand, I'm asking questions no matter how many questions I have to ask. I mean you're the teacher; that's what you're here for you have to answer my questions. I know we have this grading thing where if you turn in your working late you get a 70. If it's a day late you get a 70 minus whatever you got wrong. I'm not taking no 70 so I turn my work in on time whether it's wrong or not. I turn my work in on time and it's definitely what kept my grades up. So, other than that I really just was never big on tutors, don't get me wrong if I need a tutor, I'm going for it. I just like to get myself through it like I said the majority of the grades come from just turning your work in. It doesn't even have to be right or wrong just turn it in and get that grade and then go by everything else. Any other challenges I guess you could say are social. Being social, I didn't have anxiety about going to high school, but you would always hear the negative comments about the big seniors and how they were going to bully you, or how you were going to get bombarded in the hallway. It's definitely not that. It is not that packed in high school. I mean it's packed but not that packed. Half of these

seniors don't even come to school. So that is definitely something that I did not have to worry about. My social battery is high. OK, that was your friend in middle school now you in high school and they changed up. Everybody had to deal with that if not it's coming, I had to deal with that. I have friends now or so-called friends I have associates now so it didn't leave a big scar on me. We might have fussed for two or three days and got over it the next day. But other than that, any major challenges are few to none.

Although Red's mother never pursued an education past the high school level, that is not the path she wants for her children:

My mother never told me that you don't have to go to college NO! The conversation was like what college are you going to! But that's completely fine because I plan on going to college. My mother talks to me every day about what I want to do, any back up plans, what college I want to go to, and how not to limit my options. I have been so focused on A&T that I forgot other colleges existed. I have become more open minded to other colleges and things like that. So, college is big, she is now on my neck about applying to scholarships. Little did she know that I have been doing that ever since I was able to apply. My mom helps me prepare for college by staying on me every day, all day! She makes sure I am talking to my counselor, interacting and being in programs like TRIO, taking SAT prep and stuff like that, talking to people, reaching out to the college I want to go to, applying for scholarships and doing my part.

Red was esthetic when asked how she first came to know about the Upward Bound program. The excitement in her voice was exhilarating:

I first came to know about the Upward Bound program through my sister, I tell everybody the story all the time. I used to go visit my family in North Carolina every summer and it was when I was in middle school. She used to always come back and tell me stories about her TRIO friends or associated being in TRIO. She always had TRIO bottles and backpacks and stuff laying around. One day we went to the bank, and she cashed a check she was telling us about, the check was I think \$60. My sister was telling us how she does not have to work, and she gets paid this and that, I was like dang how you get paid from that. She was telling me that she was in the program. I was like I don't think they have that in my school. She said I have to wait until I am in middle or high school. I think she got it confused because you have to wait until you are in high school but anyways, she would always tell me about it, she told me about her funny friends, and stories. I know when we first got into middle school, we had an orientation day and Ms. Glynn had a table set up. My momma was like dang you need to make sure when you go to school you need to ask them about TRIO. I told her ok, nobody said anything about it so as we were leaving my mom was checking out the tables. It was Ms. Glynn over there and a lot of other tables. It was a chance for people to sign up for different things. There was a football table, basketball table, so my momma was like what kind of table is this? Ms. Glynn told her it was the Talent Search table and me and momma looked at each other because we were trying to find that table and we could not find it. Ever since then she signed me up her and Ms. Glynn made sure I got to all the workshops. Once I completed Talent Search, I moved on to Upward Bound and I have been in it ever since

then. I remember that story in the back of my head. I have been in the Upward Bound since 9th grade so I guess you can say two years but of course I have been in Talent Search all of my middle school years so you can say three and when I got into high school I transitioned to Upward Bound. It doesn't feel like two years, it feels like way longer. I applied to join Upward Bound because it was a family thing kind of passed on. But then I also heard more than just that I learned more about the trips we go on the paid stuff, we get paid to do nothing but show up, the push from my mother. Really just the trips and things that interested me and got me more interested in college. Every trip we go on gives me more reason why I joined. I had family in the program before I enrolled, both my sisters were in the program, so it is kind of like a family thing. Half of my friends are in the program so we do stuff at school in, in Upward Bound, out of school, out of Upward Bound, in Thomaston, out of Thomaston, we are always together and our bond is definitely growing which is great. I remember when we were back in middle school, we couldn't get along for nothing. I have a lot of Upward Bound memories, but I can remember one time we went to the Rock Eagle together. I have been to Rock Eagle before and used to participate in 4 H but I would always be home sick. I would never want to leave my mother but when I got in Upward Bound it totally changed. When I went to Rock Eagle with Upward Bound it was just better, for one I was a teen, I was around more of my friends' verses when I went another time. I just had more fun. I learned about TRIO and not just the trip aspect, but I definitely had fun on that and that is one of the trips that I can remember for right now.

Red is resilient when it comes to her education. She stated that she would not let anything get in the way of her education:

I don't experience problems with completing my education, but the classes do get harder, and they don't get easier. It feels like you are taking the same classes over and over, but they are just getting harder. Other than that, I don't have challenges. I have a goal I want to complete. I want to get that diploma under any circumstances. It gets hard waking up every morning at six o'clock, but I have to do what I have to do. Nothing can just make me say I'm not coming to high school. I am dropping out at sixteen NO! I might play about it sometimes, no I don't even think I played with that either. School is school, what else are you going to be when the majority of your friends are at school and you're not. While I haven't had any challenges with completing my education, I know if I ever need anything Upward Bound is there especially on an educational level and counseling as well. They make counseling very open as well as tutoring. I'm not going to say nobody shows up for tutoring but a lot more people used to show up when it was in person versus online. Now Ms. Steller or Ms. King would just ask who needs tutoring instead of setting up a zoom link, they will ask if we need tutoring just in case no one shows up for that tutor, so it won't be nobody sitting on the call. They do make tutoring very open if we need it in biology, science, math as well as counseling. I never really needed a paid tutor.

Red was asked if she plans to attend college immediately after her high school graduation and that is most definitely her intended goal:

Yes, I definitely plan on attending college the August following graduation. I want to get in there as soon as possible, I don't want to wait, I don't want to prolong it. I want to be there as soon as possible. I want to make those years go by faster. Hopefully Dual Enrollment goes well these next two years, and I won't even have to be in there for four years. I am ready to go to college. I am ready to experience college but as much as I am ready, I am not ready. But I do just want to get in there. I don't want to procrastinate because the more I procrastinate the more I won't want to go to college. So, after school I want to get in there while it is fresh in my mind and get out. I definitely want to go to an HBCU, but Ms. Steller definitely allowed me to be more open minded to HBCUs. A college I have had on my mind for the longest is North Carolina A&T. I want to study criminology or anything in the criminal field. I want to become an attorney. Sometimes it changes so sometimes I don't know what I want to be. In the law enforcement field or in the financial field. I wanted to study journalism, but I heard journalism didn't get paid as much as I thought. But journalism will always be a thing or something that I can fall back on. Whether it is analyzing sports whatever the case maybe, I can always correlate all the things I like into one. So, I can get a journalism degree and talk about sports or law, those are the two things I am most interested in (sports, probably money, and law). I can get a whole lot of degrees and study a whole lot of things. I want to go to A&T! I thought about a lot of other colleges, but my main focus was A&T. My mother always said if you get a full scholarship for basketball would you take that scholarship or would you just focus on A&T; I would definitely take the full

scholarship. If a full ride scholarship comes along and competes with A&T I am definitely taking the full ride, that only makes sense. I am not limiting my options, but I have to be open minded because before I used to always say A&T, A&T, A&T. Ms. Stellar definitely helped me to be more open minded.

Red stated that she has been active in both the academic year and the summer component; she describes some of the workshops, field trips, activities, and assistance the Upward Bound program has provided her:

I don't really think that Upward Bound has helped me financially. But the financial literacy workshops have done a lot for me, I definitely need more of those. Cause boy, boy, boy, having a car now and a job and I have to pay gas is not what I thought. So, I definitely need a lot more of the financial literacy workshops. As far as the stipends they are great when we get them every once in a while. The stipends are helpful when they come but just on the day to day Upward Bound helping me financially not really. I guess it depends on the way you look at it because when we do go on trips, they are free trips which are amazing and that helps. It gives me a reason to go to Upward Bound and stay in Upward Bound. It also gives me sightseeing, I would have never gone to Tennessee for spring break, but I did, and it was for free. It gives me a lot of experiences so I don't really know how to answer that question so I would say in the middle here and there. During the academic year I never have to struggle, like I said counselors and tutors are always there. They always give me something to do. The workshops once a month really help. We have not had a workshop in a minute, well we did have a Mother's Day workshop. Ms. King and Ms. Steller

asked us what workshops we wanted to do. I know a lot were thrown out like financial literacy, money management, those are the best workshops and I need some more of those. But as far as academics, it keeps me going it keeps me busy along with school and everything else it gives me something else to look forward to along with school and the stress that school comes with. Like I said I never have to worry about a tutor. I feel like the money management workshops are the only one I can remember but we have way more. I just like talking about money management. I can remember a workshop where the parents can get on as well, I think we had a realtor agent who was doing prizes and stuff and the parents were engaged. I was sitting on the sideline as well, but my momma was in there as well. No, it was a credit score workshop or something like that. It taught me new things and built onto my momma's knowledge so that helped. The people that come on not only talk to us, but they give us real world examples and at the end they give us a quiz for prizes and stuff that keeps me engaged. I definitely enjoy the workshops, more in person workshops than online but the online workshops are working well on zoom. The Upward Bound program does provide tutoring, but I have not been attending as much lately. They used to require us to get on the tutor calls but now they kind of limit it. In the past couple of months, they have not required it, it is there if you need it you just have to ask. But I know back in 9th grade we had to log on to two tutoring calls a week. It used to kill me because I used to be on the bus having to get home because it started at 3:30 and I didn't get home until four, so I had to be on the bus with my EarPods listening to the tutoring calls. I never necessarily need it, but I always logged on because half

of the kids that logged on were in my grade. They would do it by grade level anyways. I remember one time we logged on with one of my math teachers. They used one of my math teachers, Ms. York, to do the call. Actually, that was when I was in the Math Science program with Mr. Chad. He actually got her on the call, and it was actually her work that we were doing so it made it way easier for us, it was great we all had a fun time. We realized it was Ms. York on the call and we all got excited. It made us want to do our work and pass around those answers. In 10th grade we did not do a lot of study calls like we did when we were in 9th grade but like I said it was always open if we needed it. I love the summer program. Going to Gordon was a great experience. I'm glad we were able to get in there even through COVID, I hate that we could not do the talent show but I heard it is coming back this year. I loved it, Gordon was a fun experience, the college lifestyle on campus lifestyle was fun as well. It gives me something to look forward to. Now the beds are high, but I enjoyed it. The mentors are young Upward Bound alumni who come back, they are good as well. We were with them more often than Ms. King because she was doing the outside things and they were actually with us taking us to our classes and eating lunch with us. They were around our age group, and we knew half of them so that made it comfortable for us to be around them. We were able to be around our friends and gave us something to do other than sit around the house, so I had a lot of fun with that. They definitely kept us on a strict schedule. I felt like I was in school again. I can't wait for this year. It is supposed to be a movie this summer. I think we are staying at two colleges this summer. My most

memorable trip was the most recent trip to Tennessee. For one they flew us out, I have flown before but for some of my friends it was their first experience. It was also one of our last experiences with Ms. Glynn, so we enjoyed that. We were with the Atlanta kids, so we had fun. We went to different colleges, and we were able to experience those colleges. It was amazing they provided luggage for us, we ate nonstop. I definitely had fun on the Tennessee trip. Even from the hotel, which was like a maze, we got there around 11 o'clock every night, but the Tennessee trip was fun.

Red gave an explanation why she believed there was more female participants in her Upward Bound program and her experiences with that:

There are more females in the Upward Bound program. I think more females because the males seem to think that the program is more female-like, all the girls are over here so we are not going to do it whatever the case may be. But there are a lot of boys that are in the program, they just don't participate as much. A lot of boys have started to come around their main excuse was my friends are not doing it, so I am not doing it or football. I know football takes up the summer looking at my brother's schedule. Football coaches are starting to be open minded just a little. But I know football does mess up the boys' schedules. They feel that they have to be at football practice. I understand that they have to be dedicated to that sport, but they have to be able to enjoy their summer and participate in something that is going to help them just in case they don't make it with football. But there are definitely way more females, but the males are starting to come around. The more males that are in there the more other males that are not in the program will

join. I think females rule the world and everything more than males. It takes a female for males to do something. It is fine being in a majority female Upward Bound program. I mean I have friends they're all my friends it gives me someone I can talk to, relate to, and everything else. There is drama here, drama there but that is just the world but it's no difference. I enjoy the people I hang around and the majority of the people are my friends. It's fine with me.

In the Upward Bound program, the student and staff relationship are very important to help motivate and guide students in their educational journeys

I have a pretty good relationship with the Upward Bound staff. Enough to miss Ms. Glynn when she left. Ms. Steller came along, and she has been doing a good job with keeping the relationship with the students. If given the opportunity to change something about the Upward Bound program, I would have to say nothing much, nothing, not really. When we have to do the little evaluation sheets, I never put anything in that part, I just say that I had a good time. There is nothing really to change.

With Upward Bound having an objective of high school completion and college enrollment it is important to help motivate students to stay in school:

Upward Bound helps motivate me to stay in school, I know one of the main focuses of TRIO is to get us in college or to push us to go. So, in order to go to college, I have to graduate high school. I have to push to continue. I can't stay in TRIO if I don't have good grades, so I have to keep my grades up. Everything is correlating. My momma pushes me to stay in school, TRIO pushes me to stay in

school, and I push myself. Staying in high school completing high school pushes me to go on and complete college.

Red shares her thoughts on the skills she learned as a participant in Upward Bound, going to college before joining the program, college preparation afforded her by UB, and her parents' feelings about her program participation:

Having learned communication skills, Ms. King made sure we do some type of talking or something in front of somebody when we go out, whether it is introducing ourselves or doing little presentations. My communication skills definitely have increased. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I never really took it seriously. I just never thought about it, it was just never something like (I have to go online, I have to get on track for college, or school after high school, or life) I was not in a rush, but I knew I wanted to go to college. The program is definitely helping prepare me for college in many ways, encouraging me to complete school in order to go to college, what to do to set up for college, the financial part getting accepted, and life in college. Just being at Gordon for one year has definitely opened my eyes to what to expect when college comes.

Gordon is just a laid-back college so I can only imagine what a college like A&T is compared to Gordon. So, if I think Gordon is a little too much, I can only imagine what A&T is like. The program definitely opened me to what college will look like, what it would be like, and what to expect, what not to expect, how to get there, how to stay in college, what to do, how to do it, and whatever the case maybe. The program is a big, big, big, huge, important guide concerning college. My parents encourage me to stay in the program, whatever I need to do

any workshops, anything I need to attend. They make sure I stay there; they make sure I go to workshops so I can get invited to events. Ms. King, even you, Ms. Steller, everybody makes a big deal that we have participate. Participation is not a big deal because it is not like we are participating in anything boring. They make the workshops and everything exciting for exciting events which are the trips, so my parents make sure I participate, and I am there. If I have something to do that day, I put it on hold. We don't do workshops often so it's not like I have to participate in something every day now, just like one workshop a month or simply stopping by the table to sign my name. So, it is not that hard to make sure I participate and do what I need to do. Manners are important Ms. Glynn definitely does not tolerate disrespect and that helped.

Red joyfully shared any additional experiences about participating in the Upward Bound program:

It's been great, there have been moments when Ms. King has got on to us, Ms. Glynn has said something to us, you have said something to us but at the end of the day we always have a good trip and a good outcome. The trips are amazing, I'm glad we have the trips, we are supposed to go to Chicago this summer. I have been to Chicago before but going again I'm sure there are lots of things I didn't see when I went last time that I will be able to see this time. The trips open me up and the fact that they're free makes the trip 10 times better. We don't have to worry about anything, we eat literally 24/7 so I mean everything is amazing, the hotels are amazing, even down to the tour guides and instructors. Everything is fun having it with your friends is even better, sometimes you get a little upset

when you don't get to pick that room with your friend, but at the end of the day everything always flows together. With the Tennessee trip recently, we weren't able to pick our rooms, but when we were able to settle down in our rooms, I realized who was in my room; it was not a bad room situation. We had fun, talked, laughed and we actually figured out we knew more about each other than we thought. I remember me and my friends used to get so upset when they used to call out the room names but after being in a room and stuff like that, we realized it wasn't that bad. The trips are an all-time top, having to go to the workshops, and the end of the summer, and Gordon is great too. Everybody's been talking about Gordon since last time we were at Gordon and now that we go into two colleges with both groups, we have been talking about it nonstop. Y'all definitely outdid yourselves in putting both groups together this summer! We are going to have some fun but it's going to be chaotic. Even speaking for myself and the rest of the group, that is all we wanted, was to have the two groups together, and we finally got it! Y'all got some kids on your hand but we are going to have a good time though. It's a pretty bit of us together. That is all we have been talking about putting both groups together Upward Bound Math Science and Classic. Y'all going to have a bang with this one, y'all thought we were bad then woo! Not necessarily bad; we just going to have fun together.

Sadie: "They Won't Let Me Fail"

Sadie is a 16-year-old African American female; she is in the 10th grade. Sadie is a good student with a 3.4 GPA. She was born and raised in rural Thomaston, GA. Sadie is the middle child; she has four siblings and her older siblings have pursued a college

education. Sadie identified both of her parents as her primary caregivers however she lives with her mom. Sadie's mother is a corporal in the police department and has earned a bachelor's degree, therefore, is not a first-generation student. She did not know the highest education level of her father. She was also unaware of her family's household income. Being that she was born and raised in a rural town, she had some great insights into her personal experiences:

Some positive attributes about living in a rural town is there is not that much going on like in big cities, it is quieter, and more fun because you get to go to the rooftop restaurants they have downtown and listen to concerts. It's fun! I don't see any negative attributes about living in a rural town.

Sadie is a member and participates in limited activities in her school. She is in Beta Club and a member of the National Honors Society (NHS). She just recently got inducted into the NHS. Sadie provides an illustration of her friends, how her friends describe her as a student, how her peers describe her as a classmate, she also explains how both she and her friends feel about school, and the factors that motivate her to stay in high school:

Some of my friends are Caucasian but most of my friends are African American. The majority of my friends participate in the Upward Bound program. My best friend would describe me as a smart and intelligent student. I focus on my work. My peers would describe me as a classmate who is funny and likes to help people. If someone needs help, I'll help them if I understand it. Some of my friends don't like school. Most of my friends fake like they are sick, so they don't have to come to school. I like school, it looked to me like a

learning experience to help me. I go because I know it is helping me to go to college, my diploma, and my credits and stuff so I like it. Some factors that motivate me to stay in high school are my diploma, my family, and some of my friends. Some of my friends would say “Sadie if you don’t want to go to school just stay at home.” I respond by saying I can’t do that because my parents are not like that, they will make me go to school. Some of my social interactions at school are if someone is down, I’ll go talk to them to see if everything is okay, and can I help them, if I can help them, I will help. I’m just friendly.

Sadie sees her high school guidance counselor often to keep on track for graduation:

The last time I went to my school counselor we talked about dual enrollment. He told me that I should do it. He told me to do half of it at school and then go to dual enrollment, so when I get to 12th grade, I can do all dual enrollment classes. He also told me about different colleges. He will call me up every two weeks or so to make sure I am ok and ask me if I have any questions.

Sadie has experienced challenges with her grades; some of her grades was slipping down to a “C”. She sought help from her mom, grandmother, and her aunt. Her parents want her to go to college so they will seek out resources to assist her. Both her mom and dad will go on social media and if they see a post about a scholarship, they will let her know and encourage her to apply.

Sadie was actively recruited to join the Upward Bound Program from the time she was in middle school. The director gave her an application during a recruitment session. Sadie also had a cousin in the program before she joined. She has been in the

program for two years since she was a rising ninth grader. Sadie shares her reasons for joining the Upward Bound program and memories of her first experiences:

I joined the program because I saw that we get college experiences, we get to interact with different people, and have fun at the same time and it's not boring. Also, my grandmother encouraged me to join. I didn't have friends in the program before I enrolled but my cousin was in it. I hang out socially with people from the program when we are not doing program activities. We go to the park, out to eat, the pool, and other things. My first memory in the program is when we went to New York. It was my first time flying, I have always wanted to go to New York so being there was like a dream.

Sadie stated that she does not experience any challenges with completing her education. When asked the follow up question if she did experience a problem completing her education does the Upward Bound program provide her assistance, she had no response for that question. Sadie plans to attend college immediately after high school graduation. She desires to get her classes out the way, so they will not pile up on her. For her first year, she wishes to enroll at Gordon College to get her Associates in Science and become a small animal/large animal vet.

The Upward Bound program provides both academic and social workshops to help keep students engaged. Sadie emphasized her two favorite workshops was the ones which helped her plan out her future and allowed her the opportunity to focus on health and fitness by working out. Sadie stated that the Upward Bound program provides tutoring, although unfortunately, she has not attended. She mentioned she really has not

had to attend tutoring because she has been keeping her grades up. Sadie finds that the program also helps her financially; it teaches her how to budget and write checks:

Sadie has participated in both the summer and academic year components, and she reminisces on those experiences.

The summer was fun. We got to volunteer at a place we wanted to work. I participated in a place in Barnesville which I am still volunteering. We did SAT/ACT prep as well during the summer. The New York trip is my first memorable Upward Bound program. We had the opportunity to go to Times Square. During the school year I had fun. We got to go different places for example, Savannah State Georgia State it was really fun. Last year I experienced going on a STEM Girls trip where we learned more about science. There were a lot of girls enjoying their time during our fall break. We made makeup and learned how to mix stuff together to get a certain outcome.

Sadie expressed that there are more females in her Upward Bound program. She feels more comfortable in a majority female program than she would if there was more males. She believes she can see where the females are coming from and know where they are coming from. Sadie mentioned that she can deal with males, but she would not be as comfortable as she is with females.

Sadie exclaims that she has a great relationship with the Upward Bound staff. This is necessary as she continues throughout the program:

I have a close relationship with the staff. I could go and talk to them about anything, and they would tell me if I'm right or wrong and they'll help me understand why they feel that way. They also help me get through a lot of

personal things. I would not really change anything about the program; I would simply add more college tours. The Upward Bound staff help motivate me to stay in high school because they push me until I can't get pushed no more, they won't let me fail or anything they will just tell me to keep on moving.

Learning useful skills as a youth will be beneficial to students in their future endeavors. Sadie recounts the skill that she has learned as a participant in the program:

I learned how to budget. I learned how to carry myself as a lady and take care of responsibilities. I also learned how to be mature and not disrespect others.

Sadie has always wanted to go to college but being in the program made her realize that she actually needs to go to college to get her degree so she can have the stuff she wants later on in life:

I feel that the program is helping me prepare for college by staying over in college. That helped me get a real college experience by staying on a college campus. It for sure made me more comfortable with leaving home and staying at college. I am a homebody. I don't really like going anywhere and staying away from home. If I feel like I can do it, or feel more comfortable, I know who the people are going to, I will be more open to it and I will go. The more I stay in the colleges the more I will feel prepared to go. My parents like me participating in the Upward Bound program, they feel they are being helped out. They don't have to be nervous about me going anywhere, I know the experience, and how to carry myself. My parents know I am a homebody and don't like going anywhere so they told me for Ms. King to pull me out the house is a big deal.

Sadie further expressed how she feels about participating in the Upward Bound program:

It feels like family so it's not like I'm just going anywhere just like random people. It feels more like family, when you're with family even if you are not doing anything fun. If you are around a group of people like your friends, you will have fun anyway.

Shania: “An All-Around Scholar”

Shania is a senior attending Upson-Lee High School. She was a spring class of 2022 high school graduate and plans to attend Georgia Southern University in the fall. Shania anticipates studying Biology in the Pre-Pharmacy track and has maintained a 3.9 GPA.

Shania was born in Thomaston, Georgia and has lived there all her life. She is an only child, and her mother is her primary caregiver. Although Shania's mother is an Assistant Human Resources Manager with a household income of approximately \$80,000, Shania is still considered a first-generation student. This is because her mom's highest level of education is an associate's degree; her father's highest level of education is unknown. Shania's classification as a first-generation college student makes her eligible for the Upward Bound program based on the qualifications established by the United States Department of Education.

Shania was very vocal concerning her experiences, both positive and negative, of living in a small town:

You have to go like 30 minutes to actually have fun or get something good to eat. It's a small town so people just keep mess or are messy. People just are small

minded like they just want to stay in Thomaston forever and they don't want to get out of Thomaston. They just think Thomaston is their forever home. Some positive attributes about living in a small town is you not having to worry about support if you wanted to start your own business. There are people who would support you, if you wanted to advertise your business you could put up signs and stuff at Walmart because people are going to see it and mostly everybody knows each other so if you really need help with something you can get help that way. Some negative attributes about living in a small town goes back to people being messy. People can be messy everywhere, but I am talking here because that is what I know. Also, people who are not from Thomaston can look at you and say she is from Thomaston and Thomaston does not have anything, people would probably look at you differently or have something to say because of where you are from.

Shania is not only an "A" student but is also an athlete and is involved in many clubs, organizations, and activities at school. She was a varsity cheerleader from 7th to 11th grade, a member of the Chick-fil-a Leadership Academy, a proud Upward Bound Scholar, and a member of the National BATA Club which allowed her to help around the community and school as well as provide donations to charities. Shania was also in the National Honor Society which requires members to maintain above a 3.0 GPA. Shania's extracurricular activities demonstrate her dedication to her education and serving her community.

Shania categorizes most of her friends as African American and she proudly shares that many of them participate in the Upward Bound program as well. When asked how her best friends and peers describe her as a student, Shaina cheerfully responded:

My best friends would say I'm really smart and they would say I love school. They would probably call me a nerd. The one to always get my work done on time. I always go to school and never miss a day unless I have to. My peers would call me a teacher's pet, always answering the questions, the one who makes the highest scores on the test stuff like that.

Even though one of Shania's best friends don't really like school, she has older friends who are already in college encouraging her to follow that educational path. While Shania enjoys school, she does not appreciate the teaching style of some of her teachers:

One of my best friends just graduated with me but she doesn't really like school and my other best friends they're already in college. They were just telling me how you have to make sure you stay on top of your stuff because professors aren't going to remind you to do your work. I'm probably the one out of my friends who likes school the most, they don't really like school. I like school because I like learning, but I just don't like when there is a lot of work or when the teachers are not good teachers. I don't like when the teacher can't teach the lesson to make it easy to understand also, they don't give a lot of notes but expect us to have notes written. Teachers should have us write notes down and explain them so we can better understand.

Shania wants better for herself, she wants a better living, to live a life of luxury. She is inspired to be a pharmacist and wants to go to pharmacy school, factors

which motivate her to stay in high school. This year Shania only had two classes in school, so she was not social plus a few of her best friends had already graduated and her other best friend was virtual. While she did not talk much when she did talk, she did not have an attitude with her peers and friends. She was cordial, laughed, and had a good time.

Shania shared some thought-provoking experiences with her high school counselors. She was very genuine and outspoken about her thoughts on her counselor:

My counselors just wanted to make sure I had all my classes taken care of so I could be on the right track to graduate. I rarely went to my counselor though I only went to her when I had an appointment, or I had to fill out paperwork. I can probably say I've been to her office like four times out of the school year. I barely went to the counselor. Personally, I just wish I had a different counselor, one who was the same color as me. I'm not saying they didn't want you to graduate, but I would have liked to have someone to understand where I was coming from. There was a situation with a class, where my Mama didn't want me to take this nursing class, but my counselor still put me in class. My Mama was mad about that.

While Shania is an "A" student, she found it challenging to maintain such a high-grade standard. She was resilient in pushing and motivating herself to pass and keep an impressive GPA. Shania's mom and all her family want her to go to college. Her mother helps her prepare her for college in many ways:

My mom wants me to go to college and be better in life. She is preparing me for college by teaching me how to manage my money better. She is telling me to

make the right decisions. She tells me things I should already know like if you are at a party don't take drinks from people you don't know and don't leave your drinks unattended. She is teaching me life lessons. The biggest one is making sure I do my best with my finances. Making sure I don't spend all my money and make sure I have money to fall back on for a rainy day.

Shania has been an active Upward Bound scholar for four years. She first came to know about the Upward Bound program when staff members came to do a presentation at her middle school. Shania was already familiar with TRIO because she was a member of the Educational Talent Search program and she also had friends as well as a cousin who participated in the Upward Bound program. Shania hangs out socially with the friends she has and has made in the Upward Bound program, they go out of town together, out to eat, and just have fun outside of program services. Shania highlighted many different reasons which encouraged her to join and continue to be active in the Upward Bound program:

It helped us go places and they taught us things like how to do interviews. I know the workshop helped a lot like preparing for college and like new life skills. They helped with a financial aid workshop. The Black history workshop helped teach us more about culture. I like how they get us ready for college. Y'all have helped me especially with the fee waivers and stuff helping with the FAFSA really preparing for college and life. When we had the Girls Retreat and we were talking in the Sister's Circle really helped me too.

Shania faintly remembers her first Upward Bound experience because she has had so many interactions with program staff members:

I can remember Ms. King talking to us, giving us a lecture, a life lesson. I also remember Mr. Clark the dark skin counselor. When he was there, he was not there anymore but he always made me laugh.

Shania was asked about facing challenges in high school and completing her education; she indicated she was challenged by maintaining all A's. Shania continues by clarifying how the Upward Bound program assists her in resolving the challenges she faces:

The challenge I would say is making sure I am keeping all A's. I know like in college going to get harder so I will settle for B's but I'm still going to push myself to have all A's so I can be on the Dean's List. Another challenge I face would be studying. I am bad at studying. I could improve with that. Sometimes it is hard for me to focus and make the work stick in order for me to remember it. It is hard for me to memorize the work. I'm also a procrastinator but I still get my work done on time. The Upward Bound program provided me assistance with these challenges with the workshops they provided. I remember in the summer when we were at Gordon Ms. Camille came and gave us tips and pointers for the SAT. She advised us to make sure to answer all questions and don't leave any blank because of the way the test is scored. The staff also helped with the FAFSA and gave waiver codes for the SAT/ACT which helped a lot. I enjoy the workshops that talk about financial stuff because those are the ones that help me. I also just enjoy historic ones like the Black History. There was another one I can't remember but it was historic as well. I enjoy workshops that teach something while we are still having fun.

The Upward Bound is a year-round program providing students with services to help keep them prepared for the next grade level. The Upward Bound program provides tutoring. Unfortunately, Shania did not take advantage of those services, not that she does not need them, but because she had to work and had other things going on. Shaina revealed her experiences during both component:

During the academic year we went on trips, we had workshops, we had programs like the end of the year program where we received our awards. It was like dinner. You all would be at the table with updates and reminders, we could sign-in, you all told us about new trips coming up and stuff like that. During the summer program we had fun and we learned different things. The teacher experience made me feel like I was really in college. We had to wake up early to get to class, we ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We also had fun playing kick ball. My most memorable trip or activity I would have to say is when we went to Gordon my 9th grade year and this California trip, we just went on for seniors it was really fun. What made Gordon my 9th grade year so memorable was the people. The people who were in the program, the seniors, I believe there were more people. I just remember it being fun. The California trip was memorable because I went to places, I had never been to, and it was just fun for my friends. We saw Gina or Pam from the show Martin. I cannot remember which one at the airport.

Shania surmised there was more girls in her Upward Bound program, and it really did not affect her. She said it could have been different if she was the only girl but if she is around all girls she can relate and talk to anyone.

Shania has a good relationship with the Upward Bound staff. She feels like she could text Ms. King if she had a question. Out of all the staff she has a closer relationship with Ms. King. She texts her when she need help with stuff, and she also uses Ms. King as her reference.

Upward Bound prides themselves on exposing students to new experiences and opportunities. Shania was asked if given the opportunity to add or change something about the Upward Bound program what it would be. The response given was one that deserves much attention:

I wish the program offered stuff relating to jobs. For example, I want to be a pharmacist and I work in the pharmacy. There are these other girls who go to Lamar County, and they have a pharmacy class that makes them be able to be certified faster. If they passed the certification test, they would be certified. Maybe Upward Bound could have different classes during the summertime. It could be classes you could take that would help you. The program could offer tracks in nursing, pharmacy, and cosmetology.

Upward Bound has an objective to provide students assistance so they can enroll in college the fall semester after their graduation, a way of meeting that goal is motivating students to stay in high school as well as provide them with workshops, tools, and services to prepare them for college. Shania proclaims Upward Bound has unquestionably motivated her to stay in high school:

I will say the Upward Bound program helped motivate me to stay in high school because they were always pushing, we could be better, or we could live like better, and they were being on like pursuing our education. They wanted us to do

better, they wanted us to pass, and they always refer to us as scholars. Some skills I learned in the program were doing better. The financial workshop taught me how to save money better. I have also learned how to interact with different people with social skills. For instance, talking with the students in the Math and Science program. I never really talked to the people in the other programs before because they were really younger, and I have been around them so we will probably have a little bond since we were in the same not program but same kind of program together. Also, we went on trips together.

Shania thought about going to college before joining the Upward Bound program as she hoped it was not too much work, she hoped she could do it, and she hoped she would be able to get all her work done on time. The Upward Bound program helped her prepare for college because it gave her more confidence and she know she will be successful in college. The program gave her the foundation she needed. The staff spoke to her and told her she would be great in college. Upward Bound prepared Shania for college with the financial workshops and money tips. She is better at saving money. The program staff told her things she needed to know. During the SAT workshops she was informed about the scores she needed to pass and to get into a certain college. She learned which colleges would accept her and what test scores they required. The program staff helped her complete her FAFSA. The stipend provided by the program helps Shania a little financially because she can save the money and it comes in handy. Shania attests to her mother's thoughts on her participating in the Upward Bound program:

My mother likes me participating in the Upward Bound program. When she first heard about it, she wanted me to join it because she said it would look good on college applications and resumes. She felt it was a good extracurricular activity I should participate in.

Finally, Shania was asked to share any additional experiences she would like about participating in the Upward Bound program and she shared these words:

Personally, I like the program! I am kind of sad that was our last trip when we went to California. I wish that the same Upward Bound program was at my college with the same people and all. I wish we went more places, but I was thankful and happy with where we went but I just wish we went one more place one more time. I wish we can all spend time together before we all leave in August. It was fun, “if I could do it all again I would, the Upward Bound program taught me a lot!”

Summary

Each of the seven young ladies shared their individual perspectives of their experiences in an Upward Bound program in a rural town. Many of them shared their challenges with their education and the skills they learned that helped them matriculate through high school. The young ladies also shared factors that helped motivate them to continue with their education and their visions on the future. Their experiences were diverse but also very similar. Each participant made meaning of their experiences in unique ways. The following chapter will showcase the study’s findings and display the common themes among all participants.

Chapter V

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program. The initial four chapters of this dissertation introduced the problem, a review of relevant literature, the study's methodology, and descriptive participant profiles. The current chapter reviews the research questions, data analysis, and provide the study's findings.

I implemented a basic interpretive qualitative design approach to collect data via semistructured interviews. I conducted seven open-ended interviews, and each lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews occurred in the spring semester of 2022 via the Zoom platform. The interviews were auto-transcribed with 70% accuracy by Kaltura, a cloud-based software, the researcher also manually edited each transcript to 100% accuracy. Following Maxwell's (2013) and Saldaña's (2016) approach, the data analysis process included listening to the transcripts, taking notes, and writing out each transcription for possible initial codes, as well as creating memos for the interviews.

I included a detailed profile of each participant to introduce their data descriptions. The researcher composed these descriptions from the data analysis. The researcher listened to the recordings, transcribed what she heard, read each transcript line by line several times, and then coded. Following coding, the researcher wrote a summary identifying relationships and interpreting meaning of the transcripts. I created codes based on the content and placed the codes in overarching categories. These categories helped identify similar topics which were placed together to interpret the meaning and

create a code manual. The researcher created the code manual and reached saturation after the fourth interview. The researcher used the code manual with the remaining three interviews. As I collected data and coded, several other themes and subthemes emerged. I transcribed the interviews, demographic questionnaires, and member check strategy was used for triangulation of data to establish validity (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015).

The interviews resulted in rich qualitative data, and was used to analyze the following research questions:

- RQ 1. How do African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program?
- RQ 2. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?
- RQ 3. What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants regarding the program's influence on their personal growth development?

I recruited participants from one Upward Bound program in a rural setting. The researcher reached out to the director of the Upward Bound program and described the scope of the study. I used recommendations from the director to recruit students, which resulted in seven participants being represented in the sample. In addition, due to the study's scope, criterion sampling and convenience sampling was applied to recruit participants. Furthermore, all participants came from the same rural Upward Bound program out of the several possible rural Upward Bound programs currently in Georgia.

Table 1 shows brief demographic information of the seven participants using pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Grade	Primary Caregiver	Active Years in Upward Bound	Income Status	First-Generation Status
Crystal	10	Mother	2	Low-Income	First-Generation
Jane	10	Mother	2	Unknown	Not First-Generation
Kayla	12	Mother	4	Unknown	First-Generation
Kelis	12	Both Parents	4	Low-Income	First-Generation
Red	10	Mother	2	Low-Income	Not First-Generation
Sadie	10	Mother	2	Unknown	Not First-Generation
Shania	10	Mother	2	Not-Low Income	Not First Generation

Note. Participant income status is based on the U.S. Department of Education guidelines.

To capture rich descriptive data during the interviews, I used an interview protocol and open-ended questions (Appendix A). The use of these instruments was guided by an adaptation of Seidman’s (2013) approach to capture context and reconstruct to make meaning of the participants' experiences. Questions 1-14 asked participants to describe the living and social experiences that shaped their identities. Questions 15-42 asked about their experiences and involvement in the Upward Bound program, focusing on their programmatic participation, skill development, staff relationship, and collegiate aspirations. This semistructured interview process explored essential areas to uncover answers to the research questions (Patton, 2015). I organized themes to make meaning of recurring data. Out of these seven interviews, three main themes emerged: familial influences, program support and motivation, and self-motivation and resilience.

Familial Influences

Familial influences and support were significant factors in motivating the participants to stay in high school and continue their education. The desire to make their parents proud, go beyond their parents' educational attainments, and being able to provide financial support for their parents in the future was additional factors that motivated the participants to reach their academic goals. For example, Red stated her family motivates her to stay in high school.

Definitely my family helped motivate me to stay in high school, I know it's kind of an average or mediocre answer but it's definitely my family. Recently my sister just graduated from North Carolina A&T, and she is going to the military as an MP, and she got a car straight out of college. The more she is moving up the influence is amazing. Not only that but my mother not being able to go to college or her not going to college definitely inspired me to go beyond a high school diploma. My father actually graduated college and has a couple of degrees.

Making my parents and myself proud is important. I strive to go as far as I can go.

Sadie surmised her family, some of her friends were major influences which motivated her to stay in high school. Crystal also expressed "going to college is very important, making something out of myself, my future career, and to support myself and family."

All seven participants said their parents want them to go to college. Shania acknowledged "yes, my mom wants me to go to college. My whole family wants me to go to college. My mom wants me to do better in life." Crystal's mom also aspires for her daughter to go to college. However, her mom expressed if she does not want to go to

college, she will not be upset but continue to support her. Crystal loves school; her mom does not have anything to worry about because she will attend college.

Rural Environments

I asked all participants about their experiences living in a rural town to help understand their perception of their rural upbringing. While all the participants may not have been born in a rural town, they all relocated to a rural town at a young age and was raised in that area. All the participants described living in a rural town as being quiet and close knit, a place everyone knows everybody. Crystal expressed “living in a rural town is pretty quiet, friends you meet you grow up with, not a lot of crime, everything pretty claim, and easy going. There are things to do but not a lot of things to do.” In contrast, Shania’s first description of living in a rural town was not positive or pleasant.

I have to go 30 minutes to have fun. There are messy small, minded people here.

Some people want to stay here forever. There is a stigma about living in a small town, outsiders looked at you different.

Jane also highlighted the negative experiences she had living in a rural town. “People in small towns are more judgmental, there is limited exposure to different things here.”

Kayla and Kelis introduce the fact living in a rural town is boring and there is nothing for teens to do. Kelis emphasized everyone finds out everything whether good or bad. She conveys because the town offers little resources or activities for youth it leads to an increase in teens violence.

Of the seven participants, only two reported no negative attributes about living in a rural town. Sadie finds “it is better than living in the city you get to meet new people and get to do different things. There is not as much going on like in big cities, it's more

quiet and more fun” Red concurs with Sadie’s sentiments on rural towns. “Everyone and everything are close, you know of a lot of people, I like living in a rural town. Rural towns are more steady; not as fast paced as the city. Rural towns are very family-like. City living is not for me!”

Lack of Exposure to College-Educated Parents

Due to their inexperience with the college application process, parents lacked a clear direction on how to assist their children with the college going process. Three of the seven participants self-reported they are first-generation students and neither of their parents attained a bachelor’s degree. The participants realized while their parents could not help them with the college going process, they found and encouraged them to participate in the Upward Bound program which would help with the process. Red discussed how conversations about college are between her and her mother.

My mother did not go to college; however, she never gave me the talk about do you want to go to college, it was what college are you going to! She stays on me every day, making sure I am in a program like TRIO which helps with college. Crystal’s mom encourages her to stay focused and find resources that will help her get into college.

My mom does not have a college degree, but she told me about the UB program which will help me go to college and teach me about the college lifestyle. She encourages me to keep my grades up and stay focused. She wants to keep me on the right path. Both my mom and dad want me to go to college. My mom goes on Facebook and if she sees scholarship information, she will tell me to apply, my dad does the same. They want me to have resources.

Jane, like all of the other participants' parents, wants her to go to college.

My parents help me by making me join as many programs as possible that talk about college. They make sure I'm on top of my schoolwork. So, I can be exposed to as much information about college as I can.

While many of the participants had parents that did not attain a college degree or live in a college dorm room, all the students were excited about spending time on Gordon College campus during the summer program. They mentioned "it felt like we were real college students;" "staying in the dorms gave me a small college experience;" "we went to Gordon, and we felt like real college students;" "at Gordon we had classes that taught us about upcoming classes for the academic year;" "it was very fun we went to Gordon got a feel for how their dorms look;" and "life in college Gordon has helped with that."

Program Support and Motivation

The next point that emerged was the support and motivation the participants received in the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound staff develop bonds and relationships with students not only to reach the goals and objectives of the program but to help students in their growth and development in becoming successful adults. All the participants believe Upward Bound staff helped motivate them to stay in high school. They all go further to explain the staff are like second families they can talk to about anything. For example, Shania exclaimed how they pushed her. "The Upward Bound staff pushed and told us we can be better. They wanted us to pass, they called us scholars."

Red and the other five participants have similar experiences. Red agrees the staff pushed her as well. "The main focus for Upward Bound is to get us to go to

college. They push us to continue, I can't stay in the program if I don't get good grades. The goal is for us to complete college." Additionally, Crystal added how the staff is looking out for her future. "They care about your future. They want you to stay in high school and they want you to get the best education. They want to make sure you are not leading down a bad path."

The participants felt very strong about their relationship with the Upward Bound staff, and they developed familial bonds with them. Kayla proudly explained how she felt about the staff. "They are like second parents to me. They are always there for me. They always ask how I am doing." Kelis also feels like she has developed familial ties with the staff. "I call them my family. I love them so dearly." Crystal introduces the fact staff are nonjudgmental.

I get along great with all the staff, they are easy to talk to about things, they don't judge you, they give honest opinions, they listen when you talk to them. They won't hurt your feelings. They make sure you feel like you are being heard. They are fun! Not like strict teachers. They are more laid back like one of you but commanded and given respect.

Secondary Support: High School Counselors

Many of the participants in the study did not understand the importance of their school counselors until it was time for assistance with dual enrollment or college access. All the participants went from going to see their counselor once or twice a year to receive their class schedule to now seeing their counselor at least once a month. Once Crystal needed to sign up for dual enrollment, she formed a bond with her school counselor.

I used to rarely go to my school counselor, I go now more often. I used to go once or twice a year. I only went if I got called or to get my schedule for the next year. I have been going to my counselor more and more to get help with dual enrollment. We have formed a pretty good bond. She is sweet and seems like she cares and wants to help with the future.

Red's mother always encouraged her to see her school counselor however she did not see the value and avoided him.

I just didn't know the value, my mom used to always tell me to do daily check-ins with my counselor or weekly check-ins. I just never felt like it was necessary. But as I got older and as I got to the end of my sophomore year, I wanted to do dual enrollment. Having a schedule and creating a schedule for that and they're creating a schedule for my upcoming school year seeing my counselor was definitely what I needed to do cause the level of confusion I had was an all-time high. So, I created a bond with my counselor so now when he sees me at the door, he is like what do you want! He doesn't even greet me, he's a pretty cool counselor. I have been meeting with him pretty often - about twice a week. Before dual enrollment I was only going to him to get my schedule.

While Shania would have preferred a counselor who looked like her and could relate to her, she admitted her counselor made sure she was on track for graduation.

I rarely went to my counselor. I only went to her when I had an appointment, or I had to fill out paperwork. I can probably say I've been to her office like four times out of the school year. Personally, I just wish I had a different counselor, one who was the same color as me. I'm not saying they didn't want you to

graduate, but I would have liked to have someone to understand where I was coming from. However, my counselors just wanted to make sure I had all my classes taken care of so I could be on the right track to graduate.

Kayla and Kelis have positive conversations with their school counselors. They met with them to get their questions answered and check their grades. Kayla shares her interaction with her school counselor.

I meet with my counselor once a month or every other month. My school counselor always helps me. I ask her lots of questions and she answers them. She wants me to take challenging courses. She encouraged me to stay in a difficult class and I passed.

Kelis stated “my counselors call me in about every month or every other month. She gives me pep talks. She makes sure my grades are high. She keeps it real! She is a great counselor.”

Navigating the Higher Education Process

One hundred percent of the participants indicated they have always wanted to go to college, even before joining the Upward Bound program. All participants also revealed their parents want them to go to college as well. The Upward Bound program helped Shaina find the confidence to know she will succeed in college.

I wanted to go to college. I was thinking I hope college is not too much work, I hope I can do it, I hope I can get all my work done on time. Upward Bound gave me more confidence, I know I will be successful in college now because I had the foundation people speaking to me telling me I will be good and do great in college.

Sadie declared, “I always wanted to go to college, but Upward Bound made me realize I need to go to college to get a degree in the stuff I want to become in life.” Jane also disclosed, “I always wanted to go to college but Upward Bound helped me motivate myself to understand the importance of going to college.”

The thought of going to college can be stressful and overwhelming for some students. Crystal was one of those students.

I was still excited about going to college before I was in the Upward Bound program, but I was nervous. I was stressed but Upward Bound helped with the stress because we did a lot of college tours and we actually lived on a college campus. So, it helped calm me down about going to college.

Red brings out another point of view on the college going process one many students may relate to. “I knew I wanted to go to college, but I never took it seriously. I never made it a focus, I was not in a rush, but I knew I wanted to go to college.”

Precollege Services and Skill Development

All the participants agreed the Upward Bound program offered workshops and helped them learn new skills. While the majority of the participants did not participate in tutoring, they indicated the program did offer the services. Sadie stated, “the program provided workshops, the ones I liked the most was when we created a vision board and talked about health and fitness.” Shania and two more of the seven participants stated they benefited from financial literacy workshops and would like to see more workshops like it. She asserted they helped her save for college. She also enjoyed the Black History Workshops because she was able to learn about her history. Kayla noted TikTok Tuesdays where they made videos to encourage other students to join the program was

beneficial. She found the time management and organization workshops to be helpful and valuable.

Three of the seven participants found hands-on in person interactive workshops enjoyable and beneficial as well. All the participants revealed they learned many skills as a participant of the program. Kayla, Kelis, Jane, and Red all expressed they learned communication skills from program staff members. Red indicated the director always had them do public speaking, speeches, and presentations during both the academic year and the summer program. Sadie shared some of the skills she learned through the Upward Bound program. “I learned how to carry myself as a lady, how to budget, how to take care of responsibilities, how to be mature, and how to not disrespect others.” Crystal expressed she became more open about her feelings because the staff gave her the platform to do so. She developed more self-confidence and became a little more comfortable with her self-image. Both she and Shania are more social as a result of the skills they learned from participating in the Upward Bound program.

All the participants mentioned the program offers SAT/ACT prep during the academic year or during the summer program. They indicated how the lessons, tips, and skills they learned from the instructor helped improve their scores. Kayla, a senior, found “the more I took the SAT/ACT courses the higher my score increased.”

Experiences: Trip and Activities

Participants reported the experiences offered by the program served as motivation to them wanting to pursue their higher education and continued participation in the Upward Bound program. Participants also reported life experience outside of their small town as a motivating factor in participating in the Upward Bound program. The program

frequently took them on trips to colleges and universities and cultural activities in other towns. Trips are designed for students to see regions they would not typically have had the opportunity to visit and get to experience outside of their rural towns. All the participants indicated the staff asked for suggestions and recommendations on the trips and activities they provide so they students felt it made them feel like part of the team. Crystal stated, “they get your opinion; we have a say of what we do and where we get to go. They try not to overwhelm us with trips.” All but one student expressed she joined the program for college experiences, exposure to different places, exposure to college opportunities, trips and activities, and fun experiences. Crystal vividly reflects on her experiences in the program.

The Gordon trip I think was my first experience and it was amazing. It was great. I still remember everything that happened. When we first got there, I liked the rooms and everything the way the dorm rooms were set up. You had your own space. All you have to do is share a bathroom which it's really nothing. The activities we had, we had kickball, they let us go to the gyms and stuff, and just let us hang out. It was a great experience and hopefully this summer program coming up will be just like the other one.

If I had the opportunity to add or change anything in the program it would be going to different locations. This year due to COVID since I have been in the program, we have not been able to go to many places, but I would say go more places, more out of Georgia places.

Kayla shared her mother appreciates the exposures the program has afforded Kayla as well.

My mom is very grateful I had the opportunity to be in the Upward Bound program. She loves the services, opportunities, and the exposure the program has provided for me. She feels the program helped me a lot.

Kayla went on to reminisce on some of the trips and activities in which she participated throughout her years in the program. Attending the classes at Gordon State College and living in the dorms gave me a small college experience. The last trip was our senior trip. We went to Los Angeles for four days with other students and staff. I have never been to places like New or Los Angeles, so this was a big experience for me. The Upward Bound program allowed me to experience things I did not expect like meeting new people and making new friends. I enjoyed the big trips out of state as well as the local activities. Kelis remembers spending her birthday participating in an Upward Bound activity.

My most memorable trip or activity with the Upward Bound program I would say was my birthday. I got to spend my birthday with them one time at Six Flags. I didn't get to go on too many rides, but they still made my day special.

Sadie's first flying experience was with the program, and she really treasures that memory.

My first memory in the program is when we went to New York. It was my first time flying, I have always wanted to go to New York so being there was like a dream.

Shaina has had many great memories and experiences with the program but one activity that stands out most to her was the Sisters Circle. "When we had the Girls Retreat and

we were talking in the Sister's Circle really helped me. We got to talk about things we wanted to talk about but didn't know how."

Family-like Environment

Kelis acknowledged, "when I think of Upward Bound, I think of a family having somebody I can always call." All seven participants expressed their comfort, love, and enjoyment of the program. They indicated how before joining the program some were shy and reserved but as they participated more in program activities and got to know their fellow peers and staff, they got out of their comfort zones. The participants all revealed the program made them feel like they were part of a family. The participants also disclosed they call the program staff their second family. Red ascertained "we were family on the trips, not students and staff but family." Sadie shared how she feels about the program staff and her peers.

The Upward Bound program feels like family. So, it's not like I am going places with random people. It feels like it is family. When you are with family, even if you are not doing anything fun, if you are around a group of friends, you will have fun anyway.

Kayla and Shaina, both seniors, emotionally shared how they are going to miss the program. They are not ready to leave and wish they had the opportunity to participate in one more activity. Both girls unfortunately stated the college they are attending in the fall does not offer a TRIO program. Both girls found their senior trip to California to be memorable experiences because that is their last trip as members of the Upward Bound program.

Sense of Belonging: Mentoring and Support

Participants revealed varying interactions in which they felt mentored and received support. Crystal and several participants indicated they joined the program because it would provide support for them with their education. Crystal mentioned “the staff is very supportive when it comes to your grades and anything you are worried about.” Crystal also stated she experienced internal support to keep motivating her to make something of herself. There are moments when it is difficult for self-motivation. Red also supports herself; she stated, “I just like to get myself through.” Jane revealed “I try to keep on getting motivated like keep on pushing myself but sometimes I am not always as I could be.” Jane stated her parents are supportive of her participation in the program because of the opportunities they provide. Red found the mentoring the young Upward Bound Alumni provided was very helpful during the summer program. Shania discussed the types of support she gets from people living in a rural town.

You don’t have to worry about support if you want to start your own business, there are people who would support you. Mostly everybody knows each other so if you really need help with something you can get help.

Three of the participants shared they benefited from the volunteer opportunities offered them. Sadie continues to volunteer at the sight where she was paired with the Upward Bound Program. As a way of supporting the program Kayla plans on volunteering with the program during the summer after she graduates.

Self-Motivation and Resilience

Peer Influences and Self-Motivation

Self-motivation and resilience were the final themes which emerged from the study. Despite negative influences by peers the participants were resilient in making sure to keep focused on their educational attainment. Many of the participants expressed their close friends and peers did not like school, however that did not affect their feelings about school and their academic performance. Six of the seven participants shared their friends did not like school. In contrast, all seven participants explained they like school and enjoy going to school. Crystal's friends are some who do not like school.

Most of my friends don't really like school. But they understand it is important if they want to go to college to get themselves a good career. Most of them just want to go ahead and graduate. I love school. I have always loved school. I was never one of those kids to say I don't want to be here or what is the point. I love school. Learning in general makes me happy being that I like reading and just learning new things in general. I have been told I am a teacher's pet, so I never had any issues with teachers so that is another reason I like school.

Sadie shared "Some of my friends don't like school. Most of them fake like they are sick, so they don't have to come." Kelis and Jane brought up important points on peer influences. Kelis mentioned "my friends are very involved with school, especially their grades. I feel like I associate myself with individuals who want to upgrade themselves. So, I feel like my friends are really involved with school." Jane talked about the differences between her friends and associates.

I have several groups of friends. In my classes I am not surrounded by people I consider my friends or people I would hang out with; they are just associates or people I talk to because they are in my class. My friends are in other classes, so I don't get to see them as much. My close friends see school as a place to come hang with their friends. They are not as motivated to do their schoolwork.

All the participants expressed their positive feelings towards school. Sadie said "I like school. It is a learning experience for me. It helps me. I go because I know it is helping me to go to college and get my diploma and credits." Kayla communicated "I like going to school. It's like it gets me to understand more and I learn new things sometimes." Kelis declared "I love school believe it or not. I always say I am ready to get out of there but until it gets close to the end of the year. I love seeing my friends and my teachers, I love the school period." Jane concurred "I like school. Of course, there are some days I am not as ecstatic about going but for the most part I like it." Furthermore, Red expresses how she feels about school.

I love school. I know when I was younger school was the best. When I got to high school things changed. Cause of the scheduling. I like school. There are some days I can't wait to get out then other days I can wait. I'm like I'm not ready for graduation, I'm not ready to leave. School gives me something to look forward to and with the parents I have I have no choice but to like it.

Shania shared she likes school however there are some aspects of school and learning she has issues with.

I like school because I like learning. I just don't like when it is a lot of work, or the teacher is not a good teacher. They can't teach the lesson to help you

understand. And they don't give a lot of notes but expect us to write them and it will stick in our heads. They need to have us write the notes and then explain the information from the notes.

While the participants shared, they are close with their friends and enjoy being around them they do not let their friends' views of school and education influence how they view education. Their friends understand they have love, enjoyment, and a purpose for their education. The participants shared how their friends and peers view them as students. Crystal stated her friends describe her as a student who is hard working, probably an overachiever, and somebody who over thinks about my work a lot. Not a procrastinator when it comes to things, someone who gets assignments done earlier than they need to be done. She found her peers view her as "a sweet, very social, outgoing, probably crazy, helpful, and understanding classmate."

Jane discovered her friends would describe her as an overachiever, hardworking, and very indecisive. Sometimes she is very motivated to get her work in and sometimes she does not. Kelis felt like her best friend would probably say she is the class clown, she may goof around in class a lot, but she will always do her work. She stated, "my peers would describe me as the class clown, somebody who wants to know everything, somebody who always asks a lot of questions, and somebody who is automatically the teacher's pet without even trying." Red indicated how she believes her friends and peers view her as a student.

My best friend would describe me as a very smart student, because I stay on top of my grades, I am outspoken, when I don't understand something, I'm going

ask. My peers would describe me as fun to be around on a good day. Outgoing within schoolwork and fun to be around.

Sadie described how both her friends and her peers would categorize her as a student.

My best would describe me as a smart and intelligent student. I focus on my work. My peers would describe me as a classmate who is funny and likes to help people. If someone needs help, I'll help them if I understand it.

Shaina's friends and peers know she is very smart and serious about her education.

My friends and peers would say I'm really smart and they would say I love school. They would probably call me a nerd. The one to always get my work done on time. I always go to school and never miss a day unless I have to. My peers would call me a teacher's pet, always answering the questions, the one who makes the highest scores on the test stuff like that.

Majority Female Participation

The participants all agreed their Upward Bound Program had more female students. Shania stated, "There are more females in the program, it really does not affect me. It would be different if I was the only girl. But I can relate with the girls." Jane added, "There are more females; It helps me be more comfortable; I can relate to them; they are all my friends." Sadie Conveyed, "There are more females; I feel more comfortable with the females. I can put my opinion with what is being talked about. I can interact with males but would not feel as comfortable." Crystal, Sadie, and Shaina shared the girls retreat was one of their most memorable Upward Bound experiences. They found it to be very helpful and an opportunity to express themselves and ask questions they always wanted to ask but did not know where to ask. Crystal stated,

“During the girls retreat, we got to talk about things we all wanted to talk about but didn’t know how. It made us become more like a family. While a lot of times we are cliquish; the girls retreat brought us together.”

While most of the participants found they are comfortable and can relate more in a majority of female programs, Kayla and Red voiced the importance of having males in the program as well. Furthermore, Kayla expressed her thoughts on the number of females in the program.

There are more females in my Upward Bound Program I don’t really feel any type of way about it, but I think it would be good if there were more males in it too; It’s a really good program for youth and they should get that experience too.

Red’s expressive views on males participating in the program was very personal and important to her.

There are more females in the Upward Bound program. I think more females because males think more females are in it, so all the boys stay over here. The boys say we are not going to do it. There are a lot of boys in the program; they just don’t participate as much. A lot of boys have started to come around. Their main excuse was their friends are not doing it, so they are not doing it. Also, I know football takes up most of their summer. Based on my brother’s schedule the football schedule is starting to be a little more open minded with their workout schedules just a little. But I know football messes up the boy's schedule because they have to be at practice. You have to be dedicated to that sport, but you also have to enjoy your summer and participate in something like TRIO which is

going to help you other than football just in case you don't make it with football. While there are more females in the program the males are starting to come around and the more males participate the more other males will join.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program. In this qualitative study, I interviewed seven participants, analyzed and coded data from their interviews. Three main themes and various subthemes emerged from the analysis. The African American female students' responses to how they make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program was astounding. The program afforded opportunities to the participants they could have not imagined. The students stated the travel, exposure to new things, academic support, skills, and motivation they received from program staff helped them develop as young adults. The participants all stated they always wanted to go to college and with the guidance and additional exposure by staff they now understand the steps and have the knowledge and skill to be successful in college. The program made the students feel like they were in a familial environment, they were able to discuss both academic and personal matters with the staff further helping with their social and academic development.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

Limited studies suggest connections between young African American females, rural Upward Bound students, and their resilience to overcome adversities. Morales (2008) and Evans-Winters (2014) established despite stressors in their lives, African American females had a positive sense of self and were educationally resilient. Moreover, African American female students tend to have a more distinct sense of ethnic self, and they must learn to navigate their social and academic environment to succeed (Williams & Portman, 2014; Evans-Winters, 2014; Bryan et al., 2020; Morales, 2008). As previously stated, there is limited research on young African American female students in rural Upward Bound Programs; hence, there is a need to continue to explore the effects of resilience to empower and explore the needs of this population in the United States (Davidson et al., 2020; Williams & Portman, 2014; Morales, 2008). Therefore, the study sought to expand the knowledge of this population by exploring young female African American rural Upward Bound students in the Southeastern United States. Furthermore, Richardson et al.'s (1990) resilience model explored how they perceive resilience to their success.

Restatement of the Problem and Research Questions

Students who actively participate in the Upward Bound program for two or more years have more successful educational outcomes (McElroy & Armento, 1998). Federally funded college preparatory programs such as Upward Bound spend large

amounts of federal funds on participants. Without the program students would lack access to quality academic, financial, and cultural services. However, there are many barriers which still hinder the success of the participants such as a paucity of academic aspirations, race and gender gaps, low socioeconomic status, dearth of academic resources available to rural youth, and being raised in first-generation households. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) discovered once enrolled in an Upward Bound program, students began to benefit academically, financially, and socially. The Upward Bound programs seek to assist with closing the achievement gap by providing academic and financial resources for students who fall in those categories.

A qualitative investigation is warranted in order to interpret and understand the lived experiences of young African American females participating in a rural Upward Bound program. The following research questions served as a guide for this study:

- RQ1: How do African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound Program?
- RQ2: What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants of the program's influence on their academic outcomes?
- RQ3: What are the perceptions of African American female Upward Bound participants regarding the program's influence on their personal growth development?

Summary of Methods

I utilized a basic interpretive qualitative design for this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences, outcomes, relationships, lives, journeys, successes, and or failures of young African American rural Upward Bound

female participants. I implemented purposeful and criterion sampling techniques due to the scope of the study. I recruited seven participants from one Upward Bound program in a rural setting. Table 1 in Chapter V highlights the demographic information and profile for each participant. I conducted Zoom interviews in spring 2022. Each transcript was transcribed first by the Kaltura cloud-based software, edited by the researcher, and confirmed by each participant. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes.

The interview questions (Appendix A) were open-ended and guided by adaptation of Seidman's (2013) approach to capture context, reconstruct, and make meaning of the participants' experiences to capture rich descriptive data during the interviews. Questions 1-14 asked participants to describe the living and social experiences that shaped their identities. Questions 15-42 asked about their experiences and involvement in the Upward Bound program, focusing on their programmatic participation, skill development, staff relationship, and collegiate aspirations. This semistructured interview process investigated vital areas to uncover answers to the research questions (Patton, 2015). I organized themes to make meaning of recurring data. Out of these seven interviews, three main themes emerged: familial influences, program support and motivation, and self-motivation and resilience. From the coded data and emergent themes, the findings are presented to explain the researchers' understanding of each participants' experiences.

Findings and Discussion

I investigated the ways young African American female students make meaning of their experiences in a rural Upward Bound program. I used the resilience theory and the resiliency model as the main framework for the study. These helped provide a better

understanding on how the students' resilience and perseverance help them overcome obstacles. Within these seven interviews, three main themes emerged: (a) familial influences, (b) program support and motivation, and (c) self-motivation and resilience.

The young African American female participants encounter familial influences in various ways. They experience it through living in a rural town and the close-knit family like environment. Second, the support they receive from their parents and friends. Finally, the participants in the present study receive familial influences from the Upward Bound staff, which many of them view as family or a second family.

Program support and motivation was a major finding in the study. While Upward Bound offers workshops, field trips, financial assistance, and tutoring, it is the mentoring, guidance, motivation, and support that helps keep the students focused on learning and succeeding. It is the relationships and the bonds with the staff the students highlight when reminiscing on the lived experiences of the program.

Finally, self-motivation and resilience was a very important finding in the study. While many of the participants come from first-generation and low-income households, they realize in order to have a successful future and to help themselves and their family they must graduate from high school, enroll in college, and obtain a college degree. The young ladies must motivate themselves to strive to do their best, they must take advantage of the services, workshops, activities, and support offered by the Upward Bound program. Finally, they must encourage themselves to continue to go to school and get an education, they must be resilient and stand up to the negative peer pressure from friends who do not like school and encourage them to neglect their studies. These

participants must find what it is that motivates them the most and keep it at the forefront of their minds to keep them focused and on the right path.

Familial Influences

All seven participants acknowledged their parents want them to go to college and their parents (majority mothers) showed them emotional support and motivation. The desire to make their parents proud, go beyond their parents' educational attainments, and being able to provide financial support for their parents in the future was factors that motivated the participants to reach their academic goals. The concept of familial influences emerged from immediate family members, close friends, Upward Bound staff members, school counselors, and the cohesiveness of living in a rural environment. The present findings are very similar to the Williams-Johnson and Cain study (2021), where the researchers found:

Family members, both parents, and extended family influence the educational aspiration of rural African American students. Family members helped instill a desire to attend higher education at a young age. Family members provided emotional support for the student to pursue higher education, however, family members lacked a clear direction on how the students can obtain a higher education. School counselors, teachers, and coaches are also noted for influencing rural African American students. (p. 49)

The present findings correlated with Garmezy and Rutter's (1988) original factors of resilience (a) dispositional attributes in the child, (b) family cohesion and warmth, and (c) support figures in the environment and the schools who can serve as identification models for the child. The participants' cohesiveness and support from their family and

familial influences help motivate them to continue on their academic journeys despite outside influences.

Rural Environment

Morton et al. (2018) found students living in a rural town found it difficult due to limited resources. Grimard et al. (2004) examined rural Upward Bound programs' efforts to help rural youth prepare for college, which exemplifies several critical obstacles for these youth. The authors identified specific obstacles low-income rural youth face in preparing to go on to college as: financial concerns, poor academic preparation, availability of college information, and self-limiting beliefs surrounding postsecondary achievement.

Rural environments were a sub theme that emerged from familial influences. All the participants described living in a rural town as being quiet and close knit, a place everyone knows everybody. The participants indicated their small towns provided them with limited resources. The participants also indicated the family-like environment they experienced in living in a rural town. Red only has positive things to say about her rural town.

Everyone and everything are close, you know of a lot of people, I like living in a rural town. Rural towns are more steady, not as fast paced as the city. Rural towns are very family-like. City living is not for me!

Educational Environment: Lack of Exposure to College Educated Parents

The educational attainment of the participants' parents and family members was a prominent factor in the students' desire to graduate high school and go on to complete a postsecondary degree. Williams-Johnson and Cain (2021) reported family members

provided emotional support for students to pursue higher education. Davidson et al. (2020) found while the African American students' parents wanted them to attend college, almost all of the students had to pay for college on their own using loans or other financial aid. The participants realized while their parents could not help them with the college going process, they found and encouraged them to participate in the Upward Bound program which would help with the process. Kelis's parents absolutely want her to go to college. She recalls how they are preparing her for college in the near future.

Absolutely, my parents want me to go to college. They help me look into more colleges. I really don't usually need help with homework but if I do I know I can go to them. Most of all they are there for me when I need them.

Although Crystal's mom does not hold a college degree, she encourages her to stay focused and find resources that will help her get into college.

My mom does not have a college degree, but she told me about the UB program which will help me go to college and teach me about the college lifestyle. She encourages me to keep my grades up and stay focused. She wants to keep me on the right path.

Program Support and Motivation

The next theme that emerged was the support and motivation the participants received in the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound staff develop bonds and relationships with students not only to reach the goals and objectives of the program but to help students in their growth and development in becoming successful adults.

Secondary Support: High School Counselors

School counselors have an important role in assisting students with completing their high school careers. They provide students' academic advising, grade checks, access to college resources, and support. Bryant and Nicholas (2011) concluded school counselors should become involved in first-generation college students' (FGCS) college preparation as soon as possible to adequately prepare them for academic success. The findings of the present study contradict the findings of Williams and Portman (2014) study.

No matter the circumstances, students should have natural support systems such as teachers, coaches, relatives, or neighbors who can help and support them.

Unfortunately, participants emphasized school counselors are not involved.

The importance of school counselors was a theme that emerged in the study.

While many of the participants in the study did not understand the importance of their school counselors when they first entered high school; by their sophomore year and when it was time to apply for colleges, they realized the significance of having a good relationship with their counselor. Jane stated she has a pretty good relationship with her high school counselor inside and outside of school.

I have a pretty good relationship with my school counselor. I try to see her as much as possible, to make sure I stay on track with everything I need to. I try to meet with my school counselor every month but one of my counselors she's a family friend so it's kind of different. When I see her outside of school, I talk to her as well.

Kayla expressed how her counselor advised her in handling a challenging class.

My high school counselor always helps me because I always ask questions about life, and she always gives me the answers and stuff I need, and she also wants me to take challenging and honor classes. I took a precalculus honors class, and it was so hard, and I told her I wanted to drop out of it, but she told me I had it and I should keep going, I ended up passing the class. I usually meet with my counselor once a month or every other month.

Navigating the Higher Education Process

Grimard and Maddaus (2004) confirmed studies have shown students who participate in early intervention and college preparation programs, such as Upward Bound, have an increased chance of graduating college than those who do not. Many students who participate in college preparatory programs want to go to college; they just do not know how to get there. All seven of the participants indicated they have always wanted to go to college, even before joining the Upward Bound program. Such was the case with Shania.

I always wanted to go to college. I was thinking I hope college is not too much work, I hope I can do it, I hope I can get all my work done on time. Upward Bound gave me more confidence, I know I will be successful in college now because I had the foundation people speaking to me telling me I will be good and do great in college.

Sadie stated, “I always wanted to go to college, but Upward Bound made me realize I need to go to college to get a degree in the stuff I want to become in life.” Jane also revealed “I always wanted to go to college but Upward Bound helped me motivate myself to understand the importance of going to college.”

Crystal discussed her thoughts about going to college before joining the Upward Bound program and how the program is preparing her for college.

Before joining the Upward Bound I still was excited about going to college, but I was nervous because I was not sure how the rooming situation was or how stressful it would be. But with Upward Bound I feel like they can more so calm you down about the whole thing and give you a lot more experience on how it could possibly be. We do a lot of college tours and again with the Gordon stay we actually were able to stay on campus and got to kind of live the college life experience not to the max but get a better feeling on how it would be. I feel like it kind of calmed me down a little bit about going to college and made me feel not so nervous to go but excited.

In correlation with the present study, Morales (2008) highlighted noticeably different female approaches to academic resilience in the college navigation process.

Females faced more resistance than males to the pursuit of their college and career goals, resulting in the need for them to overcome unique obstacles and challenges; females were more strongly motivated by their postcollege professional goals than were males.

Precollege Services and Skill Development

The U.S. Department of Education (2021b) regulations instructed all Upward Bound programs have to provide their participants with required services which include: academic tutoring, advice and assistance in secondary and post-secondary course selection, assistance in preparing for entrance exams and college applications, as well as providing information on federal financial aid and assistance in financial aid applications,

and education on financial literacy and financial planning for postsecondary education. All the participants agreed the Upward Bound program offered workshops and helped them learn new skills.

The Upward Bound program helps students in many ways and Jane shares her experiences, skills learned, and activities she has participated in so far with the program:

Throughout the year we not only learn but we have workshops, virtual and in person. My favorite workshops are the ones where we talk about saving our money. We have career trips throughout the year which teach us about multiple things like careers, places, and colleges, and we go to museums. We learn many other things like everyday things like bullying, protecting yourself, banking, and how to do your taxes.

Shania shared how the Upward Bound program assists her in resolving the challenges she faces.

I have challenges in keeping all A's. I know like in college going to get harder so I will settle for B's but I'm still going to push myself to have all A's so I can be on the Dean's List. Another challenge I face would be studying. I am bad at studying. I could improve with that. Sometimes it is hard for me to focus and make the work stick in order for me to remember it. It is hard for me to memorize the work. I'm also a procrastinator but I still get my work done on time. The Upward Bound program provided me assistance with these challenges with the workshops they provided.

Precollege programs are unique as their primary goal is to provide young people with the skills needed to be successful in college (Hetherington, 2020). Female students

take advantage of the services of precollege programs on a larger scale compared to their male counterparts explaining the growing female advantage in college completion (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). Kayla has gained many skills as a participant of the program which will help in her future.

I'm more patient, I believe, because I wasn't really patient but I'm just more patient now. My communication skills are better. I didn't really talk as much but now I talk a lot and to everybody. I used to be really shy but now I'm an outgoing person and I try not to be shy anymore.

Kayla credits the study skills and time management workshops for helping maintain her grades. Kelis shared some of the skills and lessons she learned as a participant in the program.

Some skills I learned as a participant of the program is to never say I can't do it! Really just never give up to always want to be successful and to know you got this. I learned motivation skills, interview skills, and how to talk to people. I feel like Upward Bound is definitely helping prepare me for college. I feel like it is preparing me, so I just won't be so blindsided when it's time for me to go to college. I feel like it's helping me with my people skills, my studying skills, my academic skills, really just make me a better student. My parents like me participating in the Upward Bound program.

According to Richardson et al. (1990), the idea of the resilience model is there must be disruptions, challenges, stressors, disorganizations in an individual's life. To become more resilient, the person must reorganize and learn from the experiences with stronger coping skills. The participants in the study had fears and self-doubt about going

to college. They were able to learn skills and receive services from the Upward Bound staff to teach and help motivate them to not give up and take advantage of opportunities afforded to them.

Experiences: Trip and Activities

Participants reported the experiences offered by the program served as motivation to them wanting to pursue their higher education and continue participating in the Upward Bound program. Participants also reported life experience outside of their small town as a motivating factor in participating in the Upward Bound program. Morton et al. (2018) study's findings indicated participants felt their town was small and boring, everyone knew one another, lacked opportunities, and had difficulties finding employment. Educational opportunities were perceived to be limited due to the physical location of institutions. Therefore, the experiences and exposure the program provided the participants was beneficial.

Trask-Tate et al.'s (2010) study examined the importance of family and the impact of social support on systems of psychological distress in African American girls. The researchers found low support in their academic environments, few opportunities for extracurricular activities, and increased exposure to racism and discrimination are a few challenges African American females encounter. The participants of the present study shared the Upward Bound program frequently took them on trips to colleges and universities and cultural activities in other towns. These trips are designed for students to see regions they would not typically have had the opportunity to visit and get to experience outside of their rural towns.

Each participant was able to talk and reminisce on memorable trips and activities they participated in. All of the participants mentioned some of these events and opportunities they would have never experienced if not for the Upward Bound program. Red describes some memorable moments she had in the program.

My most memorable trip was the most recent trip to Tennessee. For one they flew us out, I have flown before but for some of my friends it was their first experience. It was also one of our last experiences with Ms. Glynn, so we enjoyed that. We were with the Atlanta kids, so we had fun. We went to different colleges, and we were able to experience those colleges. It was amazing they provided luggage for us, we ate nonstop. I definitely had fun on the Tennessee trip.

Jane added the Upward Bound program provided services to the students even during COVID-19.

My first memory of participating in the Upward Bound program I feel like it would be going online virtually because it was during COVID. So, I remember logging onto the workshops a lot. During the Upward Bound summer, we went to Gordon, and we also did SAT/ACT prep at the high school. During our Gordon time, we learned different subjects as well which help prepare us for the upcoming school year. During the summer we also went on trips, and we not only did academic things we did team bonding activities with each other. We played games and learned more about our director and our peers as well. My most memorable trip was when we went to Savannah. In Savannah we learned the most history related to me, and I was most interested in.

Kayla also remembers participating in activities during the pandemic. She remembers watching the Black Panther movie on a big screen outside. She stated it was cold and she was cold, but she still enjoyed the experience. Kayla enjoyed the Upward Bound summer program, and the SAT prep classes really helped her a lot because the more she took the SAT classes the higher her score got. Attending the classes at Gordon State College and living in the dorms gave her a small college experience. She found it to be really nice and fun. Kayla also enjoyed the end of the year cultural trips. Her most memorable cultural trip was the trip to New York. She felt there was “good vibes.” It was most memorable because she was in New York during her birthday. During the summer program, she has been afforded the opportunity to take classes taught by college professors while she is still a high school student. She was excited because those experiences really prepared her for college.

Red is fortunate enough to not have to struggle with her academics; she does mention the counselors and tutors are always available if she needs them.

During the academic year I never have to struggle, like I said counselors and tutors are always there. They always give me something to do. The workshops once a month really help. Ms. King and Ms. Steller asked us what workshops we wanted to do. I know a lot were thrown out like financial literacy, money management, those are the best workshops and I need some more of those.

Crystal expressed her memorable experiences and gratitude for the program.

I got to go places and experience new things and not be stuck at home. I feel like Upward Bound is a great way to express yourself and just get a feel for new

people and new experiences. They pretty much get you ready for college without giving you too much of that experience so you can experience it for yourself.

Family-like Environment

Vega et al. (2015) shared students felt administrators, teachers, and counselors did not care about them. While all the students reported high career aspirations, they encountered barriers made their educational goals difficult to navigate, according to Vega et al. (2015). The students reported some teachers did not care if they understood the information, and they wondered why they were teachers. Williams and Portman (2014) reported no matter the circumstances, students should have natural support systems such as teachers, coaches, relatives, or neighbors who can help and support them. Unfortunately, participants emphasized school counselors are not involved. They felt the counselor took the counseling out of the profession.

The participants in the present study had their Upward Bound staff to rely on for academic, social, and emotional support. The participants noted how the Upward Bound staff made them feel compared to school staff. All the participants only had positive things to say about the Upward Bound staff. Many of them expressed they feel like the staff are their family or second family. Sadie added when she travels with the Upward Bound staff it feels like family so it's not like she is just going anywhere with random people. Kelis passionately expressed how she feels about the Upward Bound staff.

When I think of Upward Bound, I think of a family having somebody I can always call. I call them my family and I love them so dearly. I feel like we were family on trips. We were not students and staff members, we were family! I want to highlight the staff. I feel like most people try to degrade students but TRIO or

Upward Bound never degrade us. They always help us! They always help us grow and become better students and people.

Sense of Belonging: Mentoring and Support

The College Board (n.d.) found a college education provides a life of options rather than limitations. Having support from school officials, parents, and the community makes higher education the expectation rather than the exception. The Council for Opportunity in Education (2021b) highlighted during TRIO campaigns, professional conferences, and workshops, countless proud Upward Bound program alumni have shared their heartwarming success stories. Most of the alum share “if they was not a member of Upward Bound, they would not be the successes they are today” others reveal their stories to encourage TRIO staff to continue to do the work and be a support in the lives of the first-generation and low-income students.

Some of the participants in the study revealed Upward Bound staff serves as mentors as well as provide them access to other mentoring services. Red stated the young mentors that help them in the summer are Upward Bound Alumni who were in the program. They all also voiced they receive support from Upward Bound staff. Crystal stated, “they are very supportive when it comes to your grades and anything you are worried about. The Upward Bound staff supports me with overcoming challenges in my education.” Jane shared how the staff supported and encouraged her to reach out if she needed assistance.

The Upward Bound staff have always encouraged us to let them know if we had any educational needs, while I hadn't necessarily had to take advantage of those

resources because it's always been a little easier for me when it came to education, but they're definitely out there for you to take advantage of.

Jane stated, “the staff encourages me to complete school in order to go to college.” Sadie illustrated the lengths the staff go to support her “the Upward Bound staff help motivate me to stay in high school because they push me until I can’t get pushed no more, they won’t let me fail or anything they will just tell me to keep on moving.” Kelis also felt the staff supports her by pushing her as well. “I feel like they push you to limits you know you can be pushed, and I feel like they just overall make it better.”

Self-Motivation and Resilience

Peer Influences and Self-Motivation

The final theme which emerged in the study was Self-motivation and resilience. Peer relationships influence African American adolescents’ schooling experiences; however, there is considerable disagreement among scholars about how much, and in what ways, African American peers exert influence on each other’s academic achievement. Relationships with peers during childhood and adolescence are thought to promote competence in a number of areas, including psychosocial wellbeing, academic motivation, and achievement in school (Clayton, 2017).

All of the participants expressed they like school and enjoy going. They see school as an outlet for future growth. While most of their peers have negative views on school the participants continue to motivate themselves to maintain a good academic standing. Crystal expressed her peers’ views on school versus her outlook on school and learning.

Some of my friends, well most of them, do not really like school. However, they understand it is important if they want to possibly go to college and get themselves a good career, something they can be happy doing but also make a living off of. Most of them just want to go ahead and graduate. I love school! I have always loved school. I love school, I like learning, and in general school makes me happy. I love reading and just learning new things. Some factors which motivate me to stay in school are going to college because it is very important to me. Definitely making something of myself and not falling behind, in life. Just the thought of being able to support myself and my family kept me going in school.

Jane revealed “my close friends see school as coming to hang with your friends; they are not as motivated with schoolwork. I like school but of course, there are days when I’m not as enthusiastic about going but for the most part I like it.” Jane wanting to be successful in life motivates her to get her education.

Kelis was fortunate enough to surround herself with like-minded peers that liked school.

I feel like I associate myself with individuals who want to upgrade themselves, so I feel like they really are involved in school. I love school, believe it or not! To motivate me to stay in high school, I try to think about where I am going to be in twenty years when I don’t feel like doing no work or I don’t feel like studying. I try to think about how successful I am going to be, and I just don’t want to be a failure.

Sadie has friends who fake illnesses to avoid going to school.

Some of my friends don't like school. Most of my friends fake like they are sick, so they don't have to come to school. I like school, it looked to me like a learning experience to help me. I go because I know it is helping me to go to college, my diploma, and my credits and stuff so I like it.

Shania realized she is the one out of her friends who really like school.

I'm probably the one out of my friends who likes school the most, they don't really like school. I like school because I like learning. I want better for myself, I want a better living, to live a life of luxury. I am inspired to be a pharmacist and want to go to pharmacy school, that is what motivates me to stay in high school.

Majority Female Participation

Researchers agreed women enroll in and complete higher education programs greater than men in most countries in the world (McDaniel, 2018; Sax, 2007). The same is true for Upward Bound programs, with female participation steadily increasing in the past 20 years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). In 2019, for the first time, the share of college-educated women in the U.S. workforce passed the share of college-educated men (Marcus, 2019). Trask-Tate et al. (2010) examined the importance of family and the impact of social support on systems of psychological distress in African American girls. Muhammad and Dixson (2008) signified Black females' educational successes are made in spite of their circumstances rather than because of them.

This research study is important in understanding and improving the African American female educational gap. The United States Census (2022) fact sheet indicated Black education is on the rise. The rate for population age 25 and older with a bachelor's

degree or higher for Black females was 30.5% and Black males was 24.7% compared to under 25% for Black females and 20% for Black males in 2010. With this growth in the educational attainment of Black men and women studies exploring college readiness and precollege programs is pertinent to the continued educational success of the race.

The participants all agreed their Upward Bound program had more female students. Jane expressed there are more female students in her Upward Bound program and explained being in a program with majority females' kind of helps her be more comfortable because they are all like her friends and she can relate more to the females. Kelis added, "I felt pretty normal, pretty regularly by having more females in the program. I mean I felt like they could understand me more than boys did, so I felt pretty comfortable." While Kayla and Red agreed there are more females in the program and they are comfortable with that, they voiced the importance of having males in the program as well. Kayla stated, "I think it would be good if there were more males in it too, it's a really good program for youth and they should get that experience too." Red was very passionate about her views of males in the program. She felt there is a large number of males in the program; however, peer pressure from friends keeps them from participating in program activities. Red also believed boys tend to choose sports over educational activities. She stated although the boys spend so much of their time dedicated to sport, they rarely make it far in the sport.

The present study aligned with Morales' study which found female participants connect their current academic tasks to their future careers, much more so than males. The socioacademic phenomenon of academic resilience has not traditionally been characterized as a gender issue; noteworthy differences appear in how females experience

their resilience (2008). Morales (2008) asserted often, females of color have their entire families counting on their success, the need to support and promote success becomes a social necessity.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is the small sample size. The small sample size limits the ability of generalization to different populations. Another limitation was all the participants were, at some time, students in my Talent Search program. Our relationship may have impacted the way they responded to the interview questions. Response to the interview question asked by another researcher not associated with the program may have resulted in different responses. However, my relationship with the participants may have allowed for more in-depth responses to the interview questions. All the participants were students from one Upward Bound program at the same rural high school, so their views and experiences are from a limited demographic area. Another limitation of the study was students who had a GPA of 2.5 or below did not volunteer for the study, only the views of students with 3.0 and above was presented. Although I bracketed my experience, my unintentional biases and preconceptions regarding this study's focus may have affected the analysis of the data.

Implication for Practice

The findings of this study carry several implications for Upward Bound staff, secondary education staff and administrators, and the U.S. Department of Education which provides funding for the programs. The findings of this study suggest the young African American female participants benefit from the Upward Bound program services. The participants reveal they benefit socially, academically, financially, and emotionally.

Furthermore, the relationships they build with program staff is very important to their participation in the program and their future academic success.

While secondary schools focus on retention and graduation the present study and the finding provide ways to enhance African American female students' persistence. The findings of the study suggest students benefit from the Dual Enrollment program offered by the school. For the majority of the students it was during the dual enrollment process that they really got to know their school counselor and formed a bond with them. Prior to Dual enrollment or college access assistant the participants only saw their school counselors twice a year for class schedules. The findings of the present study align well with the assessment of Bryant and Nicholas (2011) which concluded school counselors should become involved in FGCS college preparation as soon as possible to adequately prepare them for academic success.

In addition, the Upward Bound staff should note the African American female participants and those interested in joining these programs seek a family-like environment. The participants in this study were found to have many positive influences in the program which were shared during the interviews. The students seek exposure to experiences outside their rural towns and outside of their normal activities. The students found living in a college dorm during the summer was especially motivating. This experience made the students comfortable and gave them something to work on achieving. It is imperative for Upward Bound staff to continue to build strong relationships with students. The program should increase the number of hands-on workshops they provide to participants. The staff should continue to offer the residential summer component where students are given the opportunity to live and experience life

in a college residence hall. Additionally, it is important for directors to investigate why the majority of program participants are female and what measures they can take to recruit and retain male students.

Lastly, the U.S. Department of Education should continue to fund Upward Bound and other college preparatory programs. All the participants in the study explained if not for the Upward Bound program they would not have had the chance to experience some of the activities and receive some of the services they needed. All the participants in the study reported their parents are also grateful for the services the program provides to their children. They expressed both them and their parents see the benefits and values of the Upward Bound program. Furthermore, African American females are the largest growing minority group to enroll and receive college degrees, therefore additional research and attention should be given to this population.

Recommendations for Future Research

The Upward Bound program has had positive impacts on the lives of the African American females in the present study. The current research has implications for future research studies should concentrate on the experiences of young African females participating in a rural Upward Bound program with a GPA of 2.5 or below. This study offered insights into the experiences of seven young African American females students participating in a rural Upward Bound program. Further exploration of participants' experiences in a rural Upward Bound program is needed. Educational researchers should aim to conduct similar studies examining the experiences of young African American males as opposed to females, participating in a rural Upward Bound program.

The current research focused on one rural program. Future studies can focus on several rural Upward Bound programs in Georgia. A focus group with all the participants may have produced more in-depth exploration into the experiences of the participants. Additionally, the study did not yield any data from 11th grade students. It would have been beneficial to have participants from all grade levels. Lastly, it would have been extremely beneficial to include first year high school graduates in the study. This would have helped examine if in fact these students met their goals of high school completion and college enrollment.

Conclusion

Upward Bound was created under the leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson as a way to fight the “War on Poverty” (Johnson, 2014). President Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) brought education into the forefront of the national assault on poverty and represented a commitment to equal access to quality education. Upward Bound was created to answer the call of social justice for underrepresented students, it was created to help provide the tools necessary for this population to succeed. Education has always been on the frontline in the war on poverty because it is through learning one can overcome obstacles and barriers to success.

The participants in this study acknowledged Upward Bound is teaching them skills and offering them services to complete high school. The students affirmed they are provided with access to the tools they need to be successful. The Upward Bound staff encouraged participants to pursue their postsecondary education after high school to achieve academic success. The participants developed strong resilience qualities from the

mentoring and guidance they receive from program staff. Participants gained a remarkable sense of self and great pride as Upward Bound Scholars.

This rural Upward Bound program and countless other TRIO programs have served hundreds of thousands of students over the past 60 years, who may have not had the opportunity at a college education without program services. Upward Bound staff is continuing the dream and legacy of President Lyndon B. Johnson in helping the nation's most vulnerable population in the pursuit of an education.

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APPENDIX A

Student Interview Questions

Appendix A - STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Rural Area

1. What are your experiences living in a rural town?
2. What are some positive attributes about living in a rural town?
3. Are there negative attributes about living in a rural town? If yes, please explain?

High School

4. Are you involved in any clubs, organizations, or activities in school? If yes, which ones?
5. What race are most of your friends? Do they participate in the Upward Bound program?
6. How would your best friend(s) describe you as a student?
7. How would your peers describe you as a classmate?
8. How do your friend(s) feel about school?
9. How do you feel about school?
10. What are some factors that motivated you to stay in high school?
11. Is there anything you would like to share about your social interactions at school?
12. Please share your experiences or interactions with your school counselors?
13. How often do you have meetings with your school counselor yearly?
14. Have you experienced any challenges in high school? If yes who assisted, you in solving them?

Parental Support

15. Do your parents want you to go to college?

16. If your parents want you to go to college, how are they helping you prepare for college?

Upward Bound

17. How did you first come to know about the Upward Bound Program?

18. How long have you been in the Upward Bound program?

19. Why did you apply to join the Upward Bound program?

20. Did you have friends or family in the Upward Bound program before you enrolled?

21. Do you hang out socially with other Upward Bound students outside of program activities?

22. What is your first memory participating in the Upward Bound program?

23. Do you experience any challenges with completing your education? If yes, please explain.

24. If you experienced challenges with completing your education does the Upward Bound program provide you with assistance? If yes, please explain.

25. Do you plan to attend college the fall semester after graduation? Why or why not?

26. Do you feel the Upward Bound program helps you financially?

27. If you plan on attending college after college, which one and what would you study?

28. Can you please share your experiences in the Upward Bound program during the academic year?

29. Does the Upward Bound program provide workshops? If yes which workshops do you enjoy the most?

30. Does the Upward Bound Program provide tutoring? If yes, do you attend and how often?

31. What was your experiences during the Upward Bound summer program?
32. What was your most memorable trip or activity with the Upward Bound program?
33. Are there more male or female students in your Upward Bound program?
34. If there are more females, how do you feel about being in a program with majority females?
35. What is your relationship between you and the Upward Bound staff?
36. If given the opportunity to add or change something about the Upward Bound Program, what would it be?
37. Do you believe Upward Bound helped motivate you to stay in high school? Why or why not?
38. What are some skills that you have learned as a participant in the Upward Bound program?
39. What was your thoughts about going to college before joining the Upward Bound program?
40. Do you feel Upward Bound is helping prepare you for college? If yes in what ways?
41. How do your parents feel about you participating in the Upward Bound program?
42. Please share any additional experience you would like about participating in the Upward Bound program.

APPENDIX B
Demographic Questionnaire

Appendix B – DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Study: An Examination of African American Female Students Participating in a Rural Upward Bound Program. This demographic questionnaire asks questions about you. This information is essential to gain background information prior to your interview. The information you share will not be used to personally identify you and it will not be passed on to anyone else. If you prefer not to answer a question, simply leave it blank. Thank you for your time.

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Ethnicity/Race: White (Non-Hispanic) Hispanic
 African American Asian American Indian
 Multiethnic (Please specify) _____
 Other (Please specify) _____
3. Age: _____
4. Who is your primary caregiver? Parents Mom Dad
Grandparent(s) Other (Please specify) _____
5. Current High School _____
6. Grade: _____
7. Projected High School graduation date _____
8. Are you a first-generation student? (Neither parent has earned a four-year college degree)? Yes No
9. Mother highest grade completed (circle one): 1-6 7-9 10-12
Certificate Associate Bachelor Master Doctorate
10. Father highest grade completed (circle one): 1-6 7-9 10-12
Certificate Associate Bachelor Master Doctorate

11. Please indicate your parents' occupations:

Mother: _____

Father: _____

12. Which income group does your household fall under?

____ Less than \$20,000 ____ \$21,000 – \$30,000

____ \$31,000 to \$40,000 ____ \$41,000 to \$50,000

____ \$51,000 to \$60,000 ____ Above \$60,000

13. Do you have any siblings? _____ Yes _____ No

a. Indicate sibling(s) ages _____

b. Have any of your siblings attended college? _____ Yes _____ No

14. Do you currently participate in an Upward Bound Program? _____ Yes _____ No

a. If yes, how long have you participated? _____

15. Do you plan to attend college after high school graduation? _____ Yes _____ No

a. If yes, where do you plan to attend? _____

b. What degree(s) or certifications do you plan to seek? _____

c. What is your intended major? _____ or

Undecided _____

16. What are your future career goals? _____

17. Do you have a job? _____ Yes _____ No

a. How long have you worked there? _____

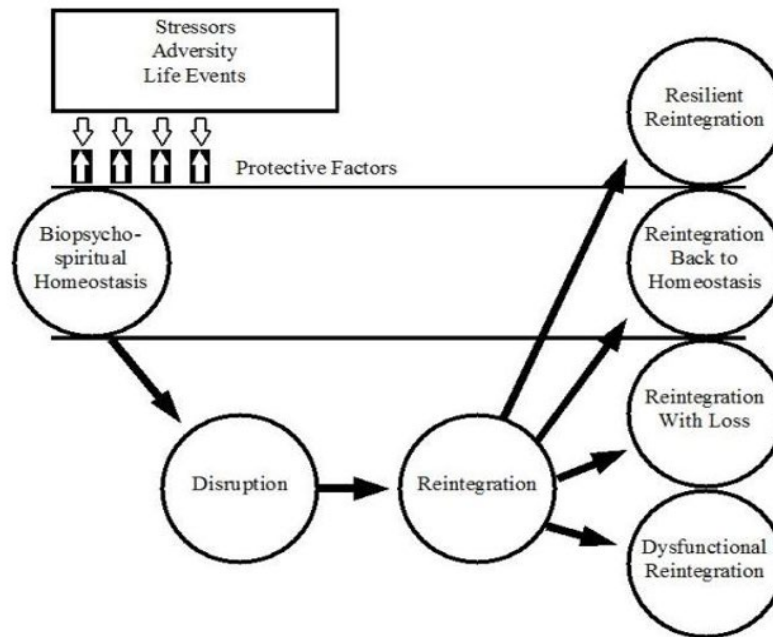
b. How many hours do you work each week? _____

c. Describe your job duties _____

APPENDIX C

Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency Model

Appendix C – METATHEORY OF RESILIENCE AND RESILIENCY MODEL



Richardson's Resiliency Model cited in *The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency* by G. E. Richardson (2002), *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 58(3), 311.

APPENDIX D
Informed Consent

Appendix D – INFORMED CONSENT

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Parent/Guardian Permission for Child's/Ward's Participation in Research

You are being asked to allow your child (or ward) to participate in a research study entitled "*The Experiences of Young African American Female Students Participating in a Rural Upward Bound Program: A Qualitative Approach.*" This research study is being conducted by *Ruth Jean*, this study is conducted under the supervision of Jamie Workman, Ph.D., a faculty member of Valdosta State University. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the way young African American female students experience the process of going through an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary. From this point on in this form, the term "child" is used for either a child or a ward.

As described in more detail below, we will ask your child to complete a demographic questioner participate in a one-one interview, as well as a group interview. Your child's participation will last for *total time estimate* approximately 45-60 minutes). Someone in your position might be interested in allowing your child to participate because this study will fill a void in the literature by helping to understand the process, characteristics, motivations, participation, and concerns of the Upward Bound students as they matriculate through the program. The study will also investigate the program's contributions to the students' academic outcomes. The study will inform program directors of ways to meet the academic and social needs of future young female African American participants and provide policy makers with data to support college preparatory programs. It is important for you to know that you or your child may discontinue participation at any time during this study.

This form includes detailed information to help you decide whether to participate in this dissertation research study. Please read it carefully and ask any questions that you have before you agree to participate. Please be sure to retain a copy of this form for your records.

Procedures:

Your child's participation will involve the completion of a demographic questioner. An individual interview (1 interview lasting 45-60 minutes). I will conduct interviews using the Zoom platform due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and social distance guidelines. You or your child may discontinue participation at any time during this study regardless of the reason.

Possible Risks or Discomfort:

This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. Although there are no known risks to your child associated with the research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you or your child may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.

Potential Benefits:

Although you [may/will] not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of young African American female students experience the process of going through an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing ways to meet the academic and social needs of future young female African American participants.

Costs and Compensation:

There will be no cost to you; however, if a virtual interview is required you must have a computer with a camera, microphone, headphones, and reliable internet service to participate. A \$20.00 gift card will be given to all study participants when participants review their interview transcripts. There are no costs or further compensation associated with participating in this study. The researcher's personal account will fund the gift cards. Students will be eligible to receive a gift card even if they do not answer all questions. The gift card will be electronically delivered to log all payments in accordance with institutional research participant payment procedures.

Assurance of Confidentiality:

Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your child's information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your child's confidential information. Participants will receive a pseudonym, and all information will be kept confidential and saved on a password-protected computer to prevent unauthorized access.

Voluntary Participation:

Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. Your child may skip any question that they do not want to answer. If you agree now to allow your child to participate and you change your mind later, you are free to withdraw your child from the study at that time. By not allowing your child to participate in this study or by withdrawing him/her from the study before the research is complete, you are not giving up any rights that you or your child have or any services to which you or your child are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University. If you decide to withdraw your child from the study after data collection is complete, your child's information will be deleted from the database and will not be included in research results.

Information Contacts:

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Ruth Jean at rujean@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate:

The research project and my child's (or ward's) role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for my child to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am either the custodial parent or legal guardian of the child. I have received a copy of this permission form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: Yes No

Mailing Address: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Printed Name of Child/Ward

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants through the date noted below:

APPENDIX E

Verbal Assent Form

Appendix E – VERBAL ASSENT FORM

Hi. My name is *Ruth Jean*. I'm a *doctoral candidate in Leadership Doctoral Program at Valdosta State University*. Right now, I'm doing a research study to investigate "The Experiences of Young African American Female Students Participating in a Rural Upward Bound Program". I would like to ask you to help me by being in a study, but before I do, I want to explain what will happen if you decide to help me.

I will ask you to *complete a demographic questionnaire which will allow me to better understand your background. A one-on-one 45-60-minute interview will also be conducted.* By being in the study, you will help me understand your experiences in an Upward Bound program in a rural setting. Being a young African American female student participating in an Upward Bound program in a rural setting qualifies you for participation in this study.

Your *parents, classmates, and TRIO staff members* will not know what you have *said in your interview or written in your questionnaire*. When I tell other people about my study, I will not use your name, and no one will be able to tell who I'm talking about. The interviews will be recorded to capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas accurately. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed.

Your parent or guardian has said that it is okay for you to be in my study. However, if you don't want to be in the study, you don't have to be. What you decide won't make any difference in your participation in the Upward Bound program. I won't be upset, and no one else will be upset if you don't want to be in the study. If you want to be in the study now but change your mind later, that's okay. You can stop at any time. If there is anything you don't understand you should tell me so I can explain it to you

You can ask me questions about the study. If you have a question later that you don't think of now, you can call me or ask *your parents or Upward Bound Director* to call me or send me an email.

Do you have any questions for me now?

Would you like to be in my study and complete a demographic questionnaire and answer questions in a 45-60-minute interview?

NOTES TO RESEARCHER: The child (under age 18) must answer "Yes" or "No." Only a definite "Yes" may be taken as assent to participate.

Name of Student: _____ **Parental Permission on**
File: Yes No

(If "No," do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)

Student's Voluntary Response to Participation: Yes No

Participant Requested Pseudonym: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX F

Institutional Reserch Board (IRB) Paperwork

Appendix F – INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD (IRB) PAPERWORK



Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants

EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL REPORT

Protocol Number: 04265-2022

Responsible Researcher: Ruth Jean

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Jamie Workman

Project Title: *The Experiences of Young African American Female Students Participating in a Rural Upward Bound Program: A Qualitative Approach.*

Level of Risk: Minimal More than Minimal
Type of Review: Expedited Convened (Full Board)
Approval Categories: 6 & 7
Approval Date: 04.05.2022
Expiration Date: 04.05.2025

Consent Requirements:

- Adult Participants – Written informed consent with documentation (signature)
- Adult Participants – Written informed consent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- Adult Participants – Verbal informed consent (Research Statement)
- Adult Participants – Waiver of informed consent
- Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with documentation (signature)
- Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with waiver of documentation (signature)
- Minor Participants – Verbal parent/guardian permission
- Minor Participants – Waiver of parent/guardian permission
- Minor Participants – Written assent with documentation (signature)
- Minor Participants – Written assent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- Minor Participants – Verbal assent
- Minor Participants – Waiver of assent
- Waiver of some elements of consent/permission/assent

Approval: This research protocol is **approved**. Your approved consent form(s), with IRB approval stamp are attached. If you prefer the original stamped consent, please email tmwright@valdosta.edu and the form will be sent via inter-office mail, or you may come by the OSPRA office to obtain the original. Please see page 2 for additional information for researchers.

Comments: ***Congratulations!***

Elizabeth Ann Olphie

04.05.2022

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

Form Revised: 06.02.16

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS:

If your protocol received expedited approval, it was reviewed by a two-member team, or, in extraordinary circumstances, the Chair or the Vice-Chair of the IRB. Although the expeditors may approve protocols, they are required by federal regulation to report expedited approvals at the next IRB meeting. At that time, other IRB members may express any concerns and may occasionally request minor modifications to the protocol. In rare instances, the IRB may request that research activities involving participants be halted until such modifications are implemented. Should this situation arise, you will receive an explanatory communiqué from the IRB.

Protocol approvals are generally valid for three years. In rare instances, when a protocol is determined to place participants at more than minimal risk, the IRB may shorten the approval period so that protocols are reviewed more frequently, allowing the IRB to reassess the potential risks and benefits to participants. The expiration date of your protocol approval is noted on the approval form. You will be contacted no less than one month before this expiration date and will be asked to either submit a final report if the research is concluded or to apply for a continuation of approval. It is your responsibility to submit a continuation request in sufficient time for IRB review before the expiration date. If you do not secure a protocol approval extension prior to the expiration date, you must stop all activities involving participants (including interaction, intervention, data collection, and data analysis) until approval is reinstated.

Please be reminded that you are required to seek approval of the IRB before amending or altering the scope of the project or the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent process/forms. You are also required to report to the IRB, through the Office of Sponsored Programs & Research Administration, any unanticipated problems or adverse events that become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions you have taken.

Please refer to the IRB website (<https://www.valdosta.edu/academics/graduate-school/research/office-of-sponsored-programs-research-administration/institutional-review-board-irb-for-the-protection-of-human-research-participants.php>) for additional information about Valdosta State University's human protection program and your responsibilities as a researcher.

APPENDIX G

Research Project Advertisement

Appendix G – RESEARCH PROJECT ADVERTISEMENT

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “*The Experiences of Young African American Female Students Participating in a Rural Upward Bound Program: A Qualitative Approach.*” The research project is being conducted by Ruth Jean, a doctoral candidate at Valdosta State University.

The purpose of this *basic interpretive qualitative research* is to understand how young African American female students experience the process of going through an Upward Bound program in a rural setting.

The interviews will be recorded to capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas accurately. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. No one will be able to associate your responses with your identity, your school or organization. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 14 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 14 years of age or older. For those who are eligible and partake in the study, they will receive a \$20.00 gift card.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Ruth Jean at rujean@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

If you are interested in participating, please inform you Upward Bound Director.

Thank you,

Ruth Jean
Doctoral Candidate, Leadership
Valdosta State University
rujean@valdosta.edu
718-813-2873